

Université de Montréal

**The Institutionalization of an Area of Research through
Published and Public Discourse:
The Case of CCO Scholarship**

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Résumé

Dans cette thèse de doctorat, j'explore l'établissement des approches constitutives de la communication (approches CCO) dans le champ d'étude de la communication organisationnelle et d'autres champs d'études. Pour ce faire, je mobilise un cadre théorique tiré des approches néo-institutionnelles. Dans un premier temps, je retrace différents marqueurs discursifs d'institutionnalisation, et ce, afin de comprendre le degré d'établissement du domaine de recherche depuis l'an 2000. Dans un deuxième temps, j'analyse les discours publics de chercheurs pendant une conférence internationale afin de démontrer comment cette institutionnalisation se fait, entre autres, à travers le concept d'ambiguïté pragmatique. De par son approche discursive, cette recherche met donc en évidence le rôle central de la communication dans un processus d'institutionnalisation d'un domaine de recherche.

Mots-clés : Théories Néo-institutionnelles, Approches Constitutives (CCO), Communication Organisationnelle, Discours, Processus d'Institutionnalisation, Ambiguïté Pragmatique, Habitualization, Objectification, Sédimentation.

Abstract

In this dissertation, I explore the institutionalization of CCO scholarship. Through an analysis of scholars' published and public discourse, I demonstrate to what extent CCO scholarship, as an area of research, is becoming established within organizational communication studies and related fields. Through an analysis of scholars' published discourse and via the application of a neo-institutional perspective, I assess the trajectory and establishment of CCO research from 2000 to 2015. By analyzing scholars' public discourse at one specific international conference, I then explore how pragmatic ambiguity plays into this institutionalization. This research thus shows how communication is at the center of an area of research's institutionalization processes.

Keywords: Neo-institutional Theory, Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO), Organizational Communication, Published Discourse, Public Discourse, Institutionalization Processes, Pragmatic Ambiguity, Habitualization, Objectification, Sedimentation.

Table of Contents

Résumé.....	1
Abstract.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Acknowledgments.....	6
CHAPTER I.....	8
Introduction.....	8
A Communicative, Discursive Approach to the Institutionalization of an Area of Research.....	11
CCO Scholarship as an Illustrative Case to Study the Role of Discourse in the Institutionalization of an Area of Research	15
Chapter Overview	17
CHAPTER II.....	19
The Emergence of CCO Scholarship.....	19
The Birth and Growth of Organizational Communication	20
The Interpretive Turn.....	23
The Discursive Turn	26
The Discursive Turn and the Emergence of CCO Scholarship	27
The Montréal School.....	30
McPhee’s Four Flows Model.....	36
Luhmannian System Theory	38
Conclusion	39
CHAPTER III	40
Theoretical Framework: Institutionalization from a Communicative, Discursive Perspective	40
From Institutionalism to Neo-Institutional Theory.....	41
Institutionalism and the Study of Organizations.....	42
Neo-institutional Theory in Contemporary Organization Studies.....	44

Kuhn's (2005) Appropriation of Tolbert and Zucker's (1996) Model to Study Institutionalization Processes within an Academic Field	47
The Institutionalization of an Area of Research through Discourse.....	50
Conclusion	52
CHAPTER IV	53
Methods.....	53
Data Collection	54
Collection of Scholars' Published Discourse.....	54
Collection of Scholars' Public Discourse	56
Data Analysis.....	57
Identification of Markers of CCO Scholarship's Institutionalization in Published and Public Discourse	58
Thematic Analysis of Scholars' Public Discourse.....	61
Conclusion	63
CHAPTER V	64
Signs of CCO Scholarship's Institutionalization in Published and Public Discourse	64
Analysis of Published CCO Discourse	64
Signs of Habitualization.....	64
Signs of Objectification	67
Signs of Sedimentation	71
Analysis of Public CCO Discourse.....	74
Signs of Habitualization.....	74
Signs of Objectification	76
Signs of Sedimentation	78
Conclusion	81
CHAPTER VI.....	83
The Role of Pragmatic Ambiguity in CCO Scholarship's Institutionalization.....	83
Defining Pragmatic Ambiguity.....	84

The Role of Theoretical/Conceptual and Methodological Ambiguity in CCO Scholarship's Institutionalization	88
The Role of Positional Ambiguity in CCO Scholarship's Institutionalization.....	102
Ambiguities in Positioning the SWG 05 Subtheme.....	103
Ambiguities in Positioning within CCO Schools During Presentations.....	108
Conclusion	109
Chapter VII	111
Conclusion	111
Summary Responses to Research Questions	111
Implications.....	113
Implications for CCO Scholarship.....	113
Implications for Research on the Role of Communication (Discourse) in the Institutionalization of an Area of Research	117
Implications for Research on the Role of Pragmatic Ambiguity in Academic Research.....	120
Limitations and Directions for Future Research.....	121
Further Exploration of the Communicative, Discursive Nature of an Area of Inquiry's Institutionalization	121
Further Exploration of the Role of Field-Configuring Events in an Area of Inquiry's Institutionalization	123
Further Exploration of the Complicity between Scholars and an Area of Research	126
References.....	i
Appendix.....	i

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CHAPTER I

Introduction¹

Science is in constant evolution, so it is not surprising that scholars have been thinking about and studying its development for decades. Noteworthy scholars like Thomas Kuhn (1970), Karin Knorr Cetina (1999), and Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1979), for example, have explored different aspects of the development and establishment of scientific theories, “facts,” approaches, and paradigms. Kuhn’s (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* remains one of the most influential and well-known books on this subject. With this book, Kuhn challenged how philosophers of science—and scholars in general—viewed the development of science and of fields of study. That is, Kuhn showed how scientific fields evolve through different phases of normal “puzzle-solving” science, followed by revolutionary paradigm shifts. Latour and Woolgar (1979), as well as Knorr Cetina (1999) and others, further advanced our understanding of how science develops. In their groundbreaking ethnographic work, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, Latour and Woolgar (1979) explored what they called the culture of science. They showed how scientists’ work revolves around the production of texts and how scientific “facts” are socially constructed. Moreover, in *Epistemic Cultures: How Sciences Make Knowledge*, Knorr Cetina

¹ Certain parts of this dissertation have already been published in the journal *Management Communication Quarterly*; see Boivin, G., Brummans, B. H. J. M., & Barker, J. R. (2017). The institutionalization of CCO scholarship: Trends from 2000 to 2015. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 31(3) 331–355. doi: 10.1177/0893318916687396).

(1999) compared two different academic cultures to demonstrate how specific research practices associated with a particular field's culture "make" knowledge. Thus, books like these were especially important for understanding the social construction of scientific knowledge. What these books did not shed much light on, however, were the processes through which scientific/academic fields come into existence, are sustained, and evolve.

Michel Foucault's (1970/1994, 1972/1989) and Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) work began to provide insight into this question. Foucault's writings (1970/1994, 1972/1989) highlighted the role of macro Discourses in the evolution of scientific fields, especially (though not only) those constituting what he called the "human sciences." As Brummans (2015) noted, Foucault showed that it "is impossible to separate the human sciences as a generic field from the conditions that gave rise to these sciences, and his work questions whether it is possible to conceive of an objective human science, autonomous from socio-historical processes" (p. 71). Foucault thus demonstrated how the development and persistence in time of academic fields are grounded in socio-historical, discursive processes. Bourdieu explored similar processes, yet focused on the "struggle for forms of capital [that] drives the operations of scholars who co-produce fields through their actions and who identify with fields through the position they enact within them" (Brummans, 2015, p. 71). Scholars "enact fields," Bourdieu suggested, "by researching a subject (physics, philosophy, mathematics, etc.); textualizing this research in the form of academic texts; using these texts to educate students; and talking about the texts at conferences" (Brummans, 2015, p. 71). Scholars, in turn, gain capital through the field's evaluation of their "textwork" (see Brummans, 2015).

Foucault's and Bourdieu's work is important for understanding how fields come into existence and are sustained through academic practices, yet they both pay less attention to the ways in which new areas of research become established within existing fields or disciplines. In this dissertation, I aim to address this question by examining the role of communication in the institutionalization of an area of inquiry. To ground this investigation, I focus on the institutionalization of "CCO scholarship" within the field of organizational communication and other fields, such as management and organization studies.

The term "CCO" first appeared in 2000 and stands for the "communicative constitution of organizations." Scholars who focus on developing and formalizing CCO concepts, approaches, and methods, are in turn referred to (and refer to themselves) as "CCO scholars/researchers." As an emerging area of research within the organizational communication discipline, CCO scholarship provides a compelling empirical case for studying the institutionalization of an area of research from a communicative perspective. As I will show, analyzing the publications of CCO scholars since the year 2000 (*published discourse*) as well as their presentations and conversations at an international conference (*public discourse*) reveals how different kinds of discourses play into the establishment of an area of inquiry. Some scholars (notably Kuhn 2005, 2012; Pang, 2006) have already demonstrated the value of institutional theory for investigating changes or innovations within a scientific/academic field. For example, in his 2005 essay on the adoption of interpretative and critical paradigms in organizational communication studies and the institutionalization of the Alta Conference (a historically significant conference in this field), Kuhn (2005) showed how useful neo-institutional theory is for examining shifts within such a field. A neo-institutional approach,

Kuhn noted, can help provide “a narrative on the forces that shaped where we are now and develops a vision of the field’s future” (p. 620).

While Kuhn (2012) argued that “in (neo)institutional theory, a recognition that explaining institutions’ reproduction and change requires an attention to local practices has...led scholars to incorporate factors associated with cognition, rhetoric, and discourse” (p. 545; see also Lammers, 2011; Loewenstein, Ocasio, & Jones, 2012; Phillips & Oswick, 2012; Sillince & Barker, 2012), his 2005 essay on the institutionalization of the Alta conference in organizational communication studies was mainly based on anecdotal accounts with a few scholars. In this dissertation, I build on Kuhn’s work to develop my own theoretical framework, one that draws on neo-institutional theory and research on organizational discourse. Subsequently, I use this framework to provide a rigorous, empirical study that explores how an area of research is institutionalized through communication (discourse) within and across different disciplines. In the following sections of this introductory chapter, I will describe why a discursive approach is useful for my research and then explain further why CCO scholarship provides a relevant case for investigating the phenomenon I aim to understand. To conclude, I will present an overview of the subsequent chapters.

A Communicative, Discursive Approach to the Institutionalization of an Area of Research

Institutional theory became a “dominant approach to understanding organizations” (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, Suddaby, 2008 p. 2) in the 1970s. Scholars like Meyer and

Rowan (1977) introduced significant changes to institutional analysis by underlining the importance of cognitive and cultural phenomena in institutions. More specifically, their *neo-institutional* approach focused attention on institutionalization *processes* (see also Lammers & Garcia, 2014). In Chapter III, I will provide a more detailed overview of the historical developments of neo-institutional theory, but what is important to mention here is that Tolbert and Zucker's (1996) institutionalization model was particularly significant for developing a process-based account of institutionalization. Tolbert and Zucker suggested in 1996 that institutionalization had almost always been "treated as a qualitative state: structures are institutionalized, or they are not" (p. 175). To explicate institutionalization as a process, the authors showed how an innovation becomes institutionalized within a field of practice through three different phases: *Habitualization* refers to the "generation of new structural arrangements in response to a specific organizational problem or set of problems, and the formalization of such arrangements" (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996, p. 181). Once formalized, the innovation becomes institutionalized through what the authors called *objectification*. This phase "involves the development of some degree of social consensus among organizational decision-makers concerning the value of a structure, and the increasing adoption by organizations on the basis of that consensus" (p. 182). During this stage, the innovation thus begins to gain additional legitimacy within specific fields. Finally, through *sedimentation*, the innovation is sustained over time and spreads within a given field of practice.

Although Tolbert and Zucker's text was groundbreaking at the time of its publication, relatively few scholars have used their model to study institutionalization as a *communicative* process. Recently, however, several researchers have begun to stress the need to make the communicative nature of institutionalization processes more explicit through the conduct of

micro analyses (see Powell & Colyvas, 2008; see also Occasio, Loewenstein & Nigam, 2015). Powell and Colyvas (2008), for example, suggested that such analyses can help us understand how “institutions are sustained, altered, and extinguished as they are enacted by individuals in concrete social situations” (p. 276).

In this dissertation, I draw on this recent work as well as on existing work by organizational communication scholars (esp. Kuhn 2005, 2012; Lammers, 2011; Lammers & Barbour, 2006; Lammers & Garcia, 2014) that explores how institutions are reproduced in and through communication. According to Lammers and Barbour (2006), a communicative understanding of institutions differs from a sociological understanding: Instead of exploring the “formal scope and power” (p. 363) of institutions, “communication scholarship [emphasizes] the local and micropractices that use or create relatively fixed routines” (p. 363). Occasio et al. (2015) also claim that a communicative approach can provide important new insights into processes of institutionalization. They argue that communication events produce and change institutional logics—communication events refer to “collections of oral and written statements and speech acts (Cooren, 2001; Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Searle, 1969) that cohere to yield a macro speech act (Van Dijk, 1997)” (p. 30), while institutional logics refer to “cultural structures that bring order to domains of practice” (p. 28). Finally, Gray et al. (2015) also promote a communicative approach to institutionalization. “[U]nderstanding how collective meaning emerges from the bottom up is central to the institutionalization process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966),” they state, “yet studies that stress top-down models in which macro-level institutional logics are pulled down to interpret events at the local level continue to prevail” (p. 115). However, according to Gray et al., “microlevel interactions form the building blocks of macro-level actions that come to be taken for granted as institutional structures” (p. 116).

This literature thus suggests that we need more empirical research that looks at institutionalization as an inherently communicative process. As mentioned, in this dissertation, I will address this question by investigating the role of communication in the establishment of an area of inquiry. I argue that analyzing scholars' communication practices, as observed in their published and public discourse, can help us understand how a comparatively young area of research becomes institutionalized within a field of study and spreads to other fields. My communicative approach is grounded in the work of scholars like Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy (2004), who argue that institutions "are constituted *in* discourse" (p. 646, emphasis added). That is, "to understand the process of institutionalization and how institutions enable and constrain action," Phillips et al. claim, "we need to understand the discursive dynamics underlying them" (p. 646).

In addition, I draw on Kuhn's (2005, 2012) communicative understanding of institutionalization. In Kuhn's view, actors tend to "[discursively] construct around themselves an environment that constrains their ability to change further in later years" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 149, cited in Kuhn, 2005, p. 623), and studying "the process of institutionalization can help such arrangements from becoming dysfunctional" (p. 623). Following this line of thought, I will analyze the role of published and public discourse in the habitualization, objectification, sedimentation of CCO scholarship as an "innovative" practice within and beyond the field of organizational communication.

CCO Scholarship as an Illustrative Case to Study the Role of Discourse in the Institutionalization of an Area of Research

A growing number of recent publications suggest that research on the communicative constitution of organizations is becoming increasingly established in organizational communication studies as well as management and organization studies (see Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, 2014; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011; Cooren, Vaara, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2014; Schoeneborn, Blaschke, Cooren, McPhee, Seidl, & Taylor, 2014, Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). Since the term “CCO” first appeared in the year 2000 (see McPhee & Zaug, 2000), CCO scholarship has gained significant traction within these specific fields. We have little empirical evidence, however, that shows the extent to which CCO scholarship is becoming institutionalized as a legitimate area of research at the nexus between these fields.

Some argue, for example, that CCO research is answering a call for organizational communication theories that scholars in the larger discipline have been making for years. In their introduction to the *SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication*, Putnam and Mumby (2014) claim, for instance, that the Montréal School’s approach to examining how organizations are communicatively constituted is “the primary perspective that originates wholly in our field rather than being a derivative of other social or organization theories.” “The Montréal School [one of the three main schools of thought in CCO research],” the authors noted, “has developed sophisticated, communication-based concepts that focus on the dynamic relationship among conversation, text and organization. It is a catalyst for a large body of empirical research and has produced original insights about organizing and organization” (p. 13). Organizational

communication studies, they added, needs to develop more “homegrown” theories to strengthen the field and “develop a discipline-based lens to study organizational communication” (p. 13).

Other CCO perspectives, such as McPhee’s Four Flows Model and the Luhmannian Systems Theory (each constituting their own school of thought), are contributing such alternative theories for understanding how organizations are produced *in* communication. This proliferation of perspectives or “pillars” is leading to fruitful scholarly exchanges in journals such as *Management Communication Quarterly* (e.g., see Bisel, 2010; Schoeneborn et al., 2014) or *Organization Studies* and at annual conferences like the *International Communication Association* (ICA) or the *European Group of Organizational Studies* (EGOS) conferences, yet no empirical research has been conducted so far to examine how published and public discourse is shaping CCO scholarship as a legitimate area of inquiry.

By addressing this issue, this dissertation aims to make two important contributions. First, as mentioned, several neo-institutional scholars (e.g., Lammers & Barbour, 2006; Gray et al., 2015; Ocasio et al., 2015) have shown the need for a deeper understanding of the communicative dynamics through which institutions are constituted, but few have explored this question empirically. In order to begin to understand these dynamics, this dissertation provides a much-needed case study of the role of discourse in the establishment of an area of research. In addition, this dissertation provides organizational communication scholars, and, CCO scholars in particular, with important insights into the practices that contribute to the formalization, establishment, and proliferation of this area of research. These insights may help scholars and students understand how CCO scholarship developed as an area of inquiry, what its main tenets and “preoccupations” are, what distinguishes it from other areas of research, and what its main

challenges are for the future. Moreover, these insights will also improve scholars' and students' appropriation of CCO theories and concepts, and it will help faculty in their teaching of different CCO approaches, both at the undergraduate and graduate level (see also Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2015).

Chapter Overview

In Chapter II, I will draw a portrait of the emergence of CCO scholarship within the historical trajectory of organizational communication studies. I will show, more specifically, how CCO research and the three aforementioned schools of thought (i.e., the Montréal School, Four Flows Model, and Luhmannian Systems Theory) grew out of different “turns” within this field. By situating CCO scholarship within the historical developments of the larger discipline of organizational communication, I consequently show what distinguishes this area of inquiry from other areas of research that constitute this discipline.

In Chapter III, I will develop the theoretical framework that forms the basis for my empirical research. I will discuss how neo-institutional theory has taken on a particular meaning in organizational communication and organization studies, and then show how this theory is useful for investigating the establishment of an area of inquiry. Subsequently, I will explain how a communicative, discursive perspective can help us gain insight into the communicative dynamics through which the institutionalization of an area of inquiry occurs, and formulate the research questions that guided my inquiry.

I will describe the data collection and analysis methods I used to investigate my research questions in Chapter IV. As I will explain, I conducted two types of analysis: I

systematically analyzed CCO publications from 2000 to 2015 (published discourse) and conducted a systematic thematic analysis of the presentations and conversations that took place at the 2015 European Group of Organizational Studies conference (public discourse). As I will show in Chapter V, the first analysis shows the extent to which CCO scholarship has become established by revealing specific signs or empirical markers of each of Tolbert and Zucker's (1996) institutionalization phases.

In Chapter V, I also show how the second analysis uncovered additional markers of CCO scholarship's institutionalization. However, this second analysis also revealed that CCO scholarship's institutionalization is for an important part fueled by scholars' use of *pragmatic ambiguity* – “the condition of admitting more than one course of action” (Giroux, 2006, p. 1229) – in their public discourse, as I will describe and illustrate in Chapter VI. That is, after explicating the concept of pragmatic ambiguity at the start of this chapter, I will analyze the role of pragmatic ambiguity in CCO scholars' theoretical and methodological developments as well as their positioning of CCO scholarship vis-à-vis other areas of inquiry throughout the 2015 EGOS conference, and thus explore how this ambiguity plays into CCO scholarship's institutionalization.

Chapter VII concludes this dissertation. In this chapter, I will discuss the implications of my research, based on insights from Chapter V and Chapter VI. I will show how this study provides insight on CCO scholarship's institutionalization process. I will then explore how it informs us on the communicative aspects of institutionalization processes and show how it contributes to our knowledge on pragmatic ambiguity in academic research. Furthermore, I will discuss the limitations of my study and suggest avenues for future research.

CHAPTER II

The Emergence of CCO Scholarship

As mentioned in Chapter I, the term “CCO” only appeared in the year 2000 (see McPhee & Zaug 2000; see also McPhee & Zaug, 2009) and CCO research has since then gained significant traction within organizational communication and increasingly also in fields like management and organization studies. If we want to understand the institutionalization of CCO scholarship, it is thus important to understand how this area of inquiry emerged within the larger field of organizational communication. In this chapter, I will therefore draw a portrait of organizational communication studies’ historical trajectory and CCO scholarship’s emergence within it.

As a number of texts have pointed out (e.g., see Brummans, 2015; Corman & Poole, 2000; Kuhn, 2005; Mumby & Stohl, 1996; Putnam & Mumby, 2014), organizational communication studies became increasingly institutionalized as a legitimate field or discipline with its own paradigms within communication studies and vis-à-vis other fields through several important changes or shifts—which, as I will show, also contributed in important ways to the “birth” of CCO scholarship. In this chapter, I will describe that interest in studying organizational communication processes arose from a practical need to train speech communication specialists in the context of World War II and U.S. economic developments, and how these business and industrial interests gave rise to the predominance of the functionalist perspective. I will then explain how interpretive perspective became increasingly

valued within organizational communication and eventually led to the “discursive turn.” Subsequently, I will explain how CCO scholarship emerged through these interpretive and discursive turns, yet also tried to distinguish itself from what came before. In particular, I will explore how the three aforementioned CCO schools or “pillars” (the Montréal School, Four Flows Model, and Luhmannian Systems Theory) came into being through different theoretical roots, and how these schools have been contributing in their own ways to the creation and development of CCO concepts and theories. By providing this historical overview and explicating the differences between the three schools, this chapter thus provides an important contextual basis for theorizing and empirically analyzing the institutionalization of CCO scholarship as an area of inquiry.

The Birth and Growth of Organizational Communication

Since the term “organizational communication” first began to be used in the 1960s, organizational communication studies has become a field that has gone through a number of theoretical and methodological changes. What characterized the field when the first *Handbook of Organizational Communication* was written in 1987 indeed barely resembles what the discipline is today.

Interest in studying organizational communication arose from a practical need to train speech communication specialists in the context of World War II and U.S. economic developments. At the time, the growing number of urban populations, which were often partly composed of recent immigrants, wanted to gain access to culture, entertainment, and

education. In addition, these new urbanites needed to have access to academic formations that would allow them to integrate the growing industries and to be able to work in the English language (Taylor & Delcambre, 2011). These practical needs thus contributed to the establishment of programs in Business and Industrial Communication in different U.S. universities and eventually led to the creation of the Speech Communication Association (the National Communication Association since 1996; see Taylor & Delcambre, 2011). Thus, business and industrial interests clearly shaped the “birth” of organizational communication studies (see also Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996).

Initially, the field “grew out of three main speech communication traditions: public address; persuasion; and social science research on interpersonal, small group and mass communication” (Putnam & Cheney, 1985, p. 131). Researchers from these three traditions were also greatly influenced by the growth of social psychology. At the time, organizational communication was thus part of the broader field of research on human relations. Hence, early studies within the field predominantly adopted a functionalist perspective and were conducted by scholars in other disciplines like management and organization studies or psychology.

As Ruth Smith (1993) noted in her seminal paper, “*Images of organizational communication: Root-metaphors of the organization-communication relation*” earlier organizational communication studies viewed communication as an object contained in the organization. In other words, early organizational communication scholars saw communication as something that happens within the boundaries of an organization. According to Smith, most scholars embraced the container metaphor for over 30 years.

Putnam et al. (1996) add that:

Two dominant interests...formed the foundation of the field: (1) the skills that made individuals more effective communicators on the job; and (2) the factors that characterized system-wide communication effectiveness (Redding and Tompkins 1988). This period, called the modernist orientation, depicted the majority of work conducted prior to the 1980s (Putnam and Cheney 1985; Redding and Tompkins 1988). It also subsumed psychological studies that focused on such topics as superior-subordinate interaction, communication climate, and information processing as well as sociological studies that centred on communication networks, work group coordination, and adoption and use of new communication technologies. In the modernist tradition, organizations were rational, instrumental entities; thus, communication embodied a utilitarian or instrumental bias. Both organizations and communication were objective realities that could be measured and tested under controlled research conditions with methodological tools borrowed from the natural sciences. Modernists also embraced the idea of objective boundaries that separated hierarchical levels, departmental units, and organizational parameters (Redding and Tompkins 1988). (p. 126)

The functionalist perspective that Smith as well as Putnam et al. (1996) describe held an important place in earlier studies that forged the field of organizational communication. The grounds for the idea that organizations are constituted *in* communication were laid later on, in the 1980s, by interpretive scholars who were critical of the functionalist paradigm. In the 1990s and 2000s, scholars further developed this idea by focusing on the role of discourse in this constitution. It is thus important to describe how these turns marked the field of organizational communication and eventually contributed to the birth of CCO scholarship.

The Interpretive Turn²

The interpretive turn in organizational communication coincided with similar shifts in other social sciences like sociology, anthropology and philosophy. That is, during the 1980s organizational communication scholars began to move away from an instrumental view of communication, and they started to think deeper about how the organization-communication relationship as grounded in language, symbols and meanings. The Alta conference mentioned in Chapter I had a significant impact on the establishment of the interpretive paradigm within organizational communication. As Putnam and Fairhurst (2015) noted recently,

Inspired by definitions of organizations rooted in social interactions and coordinated behaviors (Barnard, 1938; Weick, 1979), communication scholars gathered at the Alta conference to explore ways that language, symbols, and meanings coconstructed organizing processes (Putnam, 1983). Alta refers to several organizational communication conferences held in Alta, UT in the early 1980s that charted a gradual shift from functional or instrumental views of communication to perspectives grounded in the linguistic turn in philosophy and social sciences. Incorporating interpretive and critical theories, researchers challenged the belief that organizations were reified objects and began to develop perspectives on organizations grounded in communicative processes. This work set the stage for new theories, particularly ones that problematized the relationship between communication and organization and ones that brought legitimacy to alternative perspectives in the field. As Kuhn (2005) notes, “Through

² CCO scholarship mainly emerged through the interpretive, rather than the critical turn.

Alta, communication could be seen not only as something occurring inside organizations but also as the process that constituted their very existence” (p. 619). (p. 376)

In addition, from the beginning of the 1980s, scholars like Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) as well as Putnam (1983) began to challenge the dominant functionalist paradigm in their writings. For instance, Tompkins and Wanca-Thibault (2001) showed that Putnam and Pacanowsky's 1983 book, *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach*, was groundbreaking at the time, because it questioned what mattered in the field. “Essays in the book,” they noted, “suggested that the interpretive approach would enrich extant methodologies, which...were mainly ‘objective,’ quantitative in nature, and based on functionalist assumptions” (p.xxii).

Moreover, the first *Handbook of Organizational Communication* edited by Frederic Jablin, Linda Putnam, Karlene Roberts and Lyman Porter, and published in 1987 laid important groundwork for the interpretative turn. Yet, even at that time, the content of the handbook revealed important signs that scholars did not fully agree on how to study organizations (see Tompkins & Wanca-Thibault, 2001). Nonetheless, from this point on, more and more interpretative organizational communication research was produced and started to influence the field. Shifting away from the traditional research topics (message flow, management strategies, etc.) and the modernist view that communication is “a variable that influenced individual and organizational performance” (Putnam et al. 1996, p. 6), these studies focused on a whole new set of topics and changed how organizations were conceived and studied. As Putnam and Cheney (1985) explained, “[O]rganizational communication became seen as ‘the study of messages, information, meaning, and symbolic activity’ that constitutes organizations” (p. 131).

According to Smith (1993), shifting away from the container metaphor led some scholars to use a production metaphor to explain the relationship between organization and communication. Researchers who adopted this metaphor embraced one of three main orientations: *organization produces communication*, *communication produces organization*, or *communication and organization produce each other*. Especially scholars adopting the third orientation began to explore how “the interpretive paradigm supplements the functionalist view, particularly in its conceptualization of communication as a process of organizing. Organization, in turn, becomes a process of communicating” (Putnam, 1982, p. 205, cited in Smith, 1993, p. 35).

The third orientation thus began to merge communication and organization, because one cannot exist without the other. This eventually led the way for studies that prioritized what Smith (1993) called an “equivalence metaphor.” Scholars adopting this metaphor moved away from the “chicken or egg dilemma” that pitted those who believed that communication produces the organization against those who believed that organization produced communication. Thus, these scholars embraced,

both organization and communication to advance the idea that communication and organization coproduce one another....Coproduct arguments make it conceptually and theoretically very difficult to separate communication from organization or vice-versa, to reify or privilege one over the other, or to assume either one exists a priori to the relation. (Smith, 1993, pp. 34-36)

So, the interpretive turn within organizational communication created significant changes within the field, because it transformed how scholars conceptualize the organization-communication relationship. It was not until the 1990s and 2000s, however, that researchers

began to take interest in the role of discourse to deepen our understanding of this relationship. This discursive turn further influenced the emergence of CCO scholarship, as I will describe next.

The Discursive Turn

The growing interest in interpretive approaches, together with the “linguistic turn” in philosophy and the social sciences (Deetz, 2003), led to increased attention in the organizational communication studies to the role of discourse/language in the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001, 2015)—during this period, the same turn could be observed in management and organization studies (see Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Grant, Hardy, Osrick, & Putnam, 2004).

Citing James Taylor’s 1993 book, *Rethinking the Theory of Organizational Communication: How to Read an Organization*, Putnam et al. (1996), noted that, from a discourse perspective, organizational communication came to be seen as “a conversation in that it focuses on both process and structure, on collective action as joint accomplishment, on dialogue among partners, on features of the context, and on micro and macro processes” (p. 37). Adopting this perspective, scholars also began to highlight the importance of the conversation-text dynamic in organizational communication, where texts can be seen as “sets of structured events or ritualized patterns of interaction that transcend immediate conversations” (Putnam et al., 1996, p. 141). Discourse, in other words, came to be seen as the “constitutive force” of organizations, and organizations were increasingly seen as “discursive constructions” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). Building on Smith’s 1993 root metaphors of

organizational communication, Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) proposed three orientations for examining the relationship between organization and discourse, suggesting that the word “communication” and “discourse” were becoming increasingly synonymous for some organizational communication scholars (see also Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015). From an *object* orientation, the organization is an entity that contains discourse; that is, researchers treat “the organization as a preformed object” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 10). Scholars adopting a *becoming* orientation distance themselves from this container metaphor, because they see discourse as existing *prior to* the organization and claim that discourse produces “it.” Finally, scholars adopting a *grounded-in-action* orientation see “the organization” as being “anchored in what Giddens (1979, 1984) refers to as the *durée* or the continuous flow of discursive conduct” and thus “[treat] action and structure as mutually constitutive” (p. 16).

The Discursive Turn and the Emergence of CCO Scholarship

Putnam and Fairhurst’s seminal work played a key role in the emergence and legitimization of CCO scholarship within the larger discipline, because the orientations they proposed “served as a precursor to and a parallel development with the work on CCO that was surfacing at the time” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2015, p. 378). In spite of obvious parallels between organizational discourse and CCO scholarship, especially scholars like Taylor and Cooren put great effort in differentiating the term “discourse” from “communication,” as I will explain in the next paragraphs.

Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) referred to the Montréal School research as a grounded-in-action orientation. “James Taylor and his colleagues,” the authors noted in an earlier article

(see Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999), “draw from four...approaches to language analysis: conversation analysis, semiotics, pragmatics through the study of speech acts, and formal linguistics” (p. 8). From the Montréal School’s perspective, they noted, communication is no longer contained in an organization or something that produces it; instead, “the organization can be found in the manoeuvrings and interpretations of its many conversations. Organizing takes place in communication” (p. 9). Nowadays, Putnam and Fairhurst (2015) still align the Montréal School scholars with the grounded-in action orientation, even if the school’s more recent work “[draws] from the interplay across the three [orientations], particularly in accounting for how an organization develops materially and socially through metatexts and multiple communities of practice” (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015, p. 378). Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) referred to Robert McPhee’s Four Flows Model as a CCO approach that adopts a grounded-in-action orientation, too. However, McPhee and colleagues (see McPhee, Poole, & Iverson, 2014) claimed more recently that the model has “the potential to transfigure all three orientations: object, becoming, and grounded-in-action” (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015, p. 379).

Although Taylor and Cooren acknowledged the discursive roots of their research, they have put great effort into “recuperating” the term “communication” from rising interests in discourse in organizational communication studies as well as management and organization studies. Thus, the discursive turn coincided with and affected the start of CCO scholarship, yet also created important antinomic debates that promoted the creation and gradual establishment of CCO research within organizational communication and beyond. Writing in response to Prichard’s (2006) questioning of the *raison d’être* of organizational communication research (vis-à-vis organizational discourse scholarship), Cooren (2006b) wrote, for example:

The main reason why I disagree with the move Prichard proposes is that I sincerely think that there is an important difference between studying discourse and communication. Certainly, I concur that lying behind these words, there are established institutional and disciplinary differences, that is, competitive agendas fighting for scarce resources and symbolic capital. However, I am also naïve enough to think that these words have more or less stable meanings that prevent them from being simply interchanged or substituted. The idea of studying *communication* is for me essential because that is one of the things I am interested in when I study organizational settings. It does not mean that I am attached to this word as some sort of fetish (*interaction* would do the job for me) but that the word *communication* implies not only the idea of action but also a certain openness vis-à-vis what is communicated, which I do not necessarily find in discourse. To be sure, *discourse* etymologically means, “to run to and fro,” which implies action and even conversation. But what I like in the word *communication* is that we can use it to speak about how not only words but also feelings, diseases, or forces are communicated or how two doors communicate with each other (Derrida, 1988). I do not find this kind of openness in the term discourse, which for me tends to be restricted to verbal and, more generally, symbolic exchange, whether written or oral. (p. 657, emphasis in original)

By insisting on the broader term “communication,” scholars like Cooren and others (e.g., see Brummans, Cooren, & Chaput, 2009) played a key role in questioning the difference between the meaning of communication and discourse, and opened up debates on the relationship between discourse and materiality (see Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015), arguing that organizations are brought forth through verbal and textual language as well as a plethora of “things” (materials). Debates played an important role in the birth of CCO

scholarship, prevented this area of research from being “co-opted” by organizational discourse scholarship, and reinforced the name “CCO” rather than “*D*(iscursive)CO,” to emphasize the identity of this emerging area of research. This focus on communication also played an important role in the creation of the three CCO schools (see Schoeneborn et al., 2014). That is, these schools are united in that they back away from the assumption that organization precedes communication (or vice-versa); instead, they presume that organization “emerges and perpetuates itself as a network of interlocking communication events (Blaschke, Schoeneborn & Seidl, 2012; Taylor & Van Every, 2000) or ‘flows’ (McPhee & Zaug, 2000)” (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 305). Thus, scholars associated with each these schools “share the idea that organization and communication are mutually constituted in an attributive relationship” (p. 305). However, the three CCO schools also have very distinct philosophical and theoretical roots. To understand these differences, I will briefly describe these roots in the next section.

The Montréal School

Although it emerged at the Université de Montréal at the end of the 1980s, the Montréal School “is becoming increasingly international in its membership” (Brummans et al., 2014, p. 176). Understanding and summarizing the multitude of theories and concepts developed by scholars who are now associated with this school is challenging, but exploring some of the school’s philosophical and theoretical roots can help us understand what are the main features of this approach to CCO research.

Karl Weick can be seen as the “father” of the constitutive approach (see Cooren & Robichaud, 2011). His 1979 book, *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, and his focus on the notion of *equivocality* as the driving force of organizing provided the basis for an innovative way of conceptualizing the aforementioned organization-communication relationship. Speaking of *organizing* instead of *organization*, Weick backed away from looking at organizational structures in order to understand action (Cooren & Robichaud, 2011). He instead argued that organizing happens through processes that are grounded in human action. Hence, Weick’s processual view greatly influenced the Montréal School’s approach to CCO research (see Brummans et al., 2011).

However, Montréal School scholars rely on theoretical roots that focus more strongly on the role of language and discourse in the communicative constitution of organizations. For example, Garfinkel’s work on ethnomethodology as well as conversation analytic approaches are central to the Montreal School’s ideas. According to Brummans and colleagues (2011), Garfinkel,

insisted on the essentially situated character of all human experience. Rather than treat the “subjects” of social science research as if they were robots, manipulated by their attitudes and learned responses, in the manner of the social science studies of his time, he advanced a different agenda that focuses on how people use those tools they have to make sense of their world. Among other contributions, two principles he advanced have continued to hold in CCO research: *indexicality* and *reflexivity*. Indexicality simply refers to the dependence of words and actions on a given context for their meaning. In the absence of context, language, objects and events have potentially multiple meanings. Every occasion comes with its own imperatives, and communicative acts take on meaning there in that context. The concept of reflexivity is even more

central to CCO research. Reflexivity, from an ethnomethodological point of view, implies that the meaning of an event is not *only* dependent on the context; the context is *itself* a consequence and effect of the accounts that compose it as the context in the first place. Situations are constructed by people and their modes of constructing them, not only in language, but in the totality of their interventions. Organization is therefore the context that gives meaning to communication, but organization is constituted in and by that same communication. (pp. 19-20, emphasis in original)

Besides Garfinkel's work, Greimas's narratology influenced the development of the Montréal School's approach to CCO research. As Brummans et al. (2011) wrote, "Greimas's theory (1983; Greimas & Courtés, 1982) underscores the importance of theory in the development of narrative models of discourse." "What this perspective shares with pragmatics and conversation analysis, though, is an attention for the structuring or organizing properties of action (Cooren, 2000)" (p. 21). Greimas's influence can thus be seen in many of the studies that are conducted by Montréal School scholars, especially the research by Cooren, Robichaud, Taylor, and Van Every (e.g., see Cooren, 2000; Cooren & Fairhurst, 2004; Robichaud, 2002; Taylor & Van Every, 2000).

The theoretical approaches proposed by the scholars presented above do not take into consideration two other important aspects of the Montréal School's approach to the CCO research, that is, non-human agency and materiality. The notion of *non-human agency* is grounded in Latour's (2005) actor-network theory. According to Cooren and Robichaud (2011), contemporary organizations "call on many other material and communicative and interactional processes than the ones brought forth in Weick's interpretive processes" (p. 159,

my translation). According to Cooren, the terms non-human agency and materiality are distinct yet also closely related. The word “materiality,”

comes from the Latin word *materia*, which means “the substance from which something is made” or the “grounds, reason, or cause for something.” When we speak of materiality, we thus implicitly refer to *what stands under something*, what might explain its mode of being or existence. In connection to the CCO, we see that the question of materiality would thus refer to *what* or even *who* stands under the organization, so to speak; that is, what makes the organization what it is: spokespersons, employees, managers, buildings, operations, logos, texts, and so on. All these things and persons act and communicate on behalf of the organization; they embody or materialize it, even if this embodiment or materialization is always negotiable communicatively. (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, pp. 297-298, emphasis in original)

“Regarding the question of non-human agency,” Cooren adds,

we see that, indeed, artifacts have a big role to play in the communicative constitution of an organization. They *matter* a lot. They *count*. They display agency to the extent that they “make a difference.” They communicate how an organization is perceived and experienced—think of buildings, machines, and logos, for instance. They express their missions, official positions, and policies—think of texts and web sites. However, I have to say that I am always ambivalent about the term *non-human*, because a text, a machine, or a website is some-thing that is, in many respects, extremely human. I prefer to simply name these things that participate in the mode of communicating of an organization a mission statement, a logo, a building, a policy, a directive, a memo, and

so on. All these things are human *and* non-human. They actively participate in what stands under or supports any organization (which is also human and non-human).

(Schoeneborn et al., 2014, pp. 297-298, emphasis in original)

Finally, Taylor has, of course, become one of the key authors for scholars who identify themselves with the Montréal School. Unlike the other scholars presented above, his work cannot be considered as precursor to CCO scholarship because he is known as one of the founders of the CCO perspective and more specifically the Montréal School approach. His work has become a major reference for most Montréal School scholars. For instance, Taylor and Van Every's idea of conversation/text dialectic has become a central concept in CCO research. For Taylor and Van Every, communication and organization are equivalent, because communication represents the site (conversation) and the surface (text) of an organization. To explain their conceptualization of the conversation and text dynamic, the authors mobilized a smoke-and-crystal metaphor, first proposed by Atlan (1979):

Crystal is a perfectly structured material, in its repeated symmetry of pattern, but because its structure is perfect, it never evolves: It is fixed for eternity. It is not life. But order. Smoke is just randomness, a chaos of interacting molecules that dissolves as fast as it is produced. It is not life either. But it is dynamic. Life appears when some order emerges in the dynamic of chaos and finds a way to perpetuate itself, so that the orderliness begins to grow, although never to the point of fixity. (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 31)

In addition, as Schoeneborn and Vásquez (2017) explained citing Taylor and Van Every (2000),

text is associated with a “string of language” (p. 37) that materializes human sensemaking. However, this does not imply that texts are necessarily written, given that any discursive resource that enters meaning making can be considered a text. In turn, *conversation* refers to the situated activity of interaction in which text is reflexively and retrospectively created. Hence, for Taylor and Van Every (2000), organization emerges in communication as described in text and realized in conversation. (p. 6, emphasis in original)

In Taylor and Van Every’s conceptualization texts and conversation are therefore interconnected and interdependent. It is in the dynamic of conversation-becoming-text and text-being-materialized-into-conversation that communication intersects with organization. Put differently, Schoeneborn and Vásquez (2017) explained that, “Taylor and Van Every conceptualized the emergence of organization as the interplay of discourses (what they called “text”) and interaction (what they called conversation)” (p. 2).

This brief review of some of the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the Montréal School is in no way exhaustive (for a more thorough review, see Brummans et al., 2014; Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). However, this review does show how Montréal School scholars draw on a diverse set of authors to develop their own conceptualization of the communicative constitution of organizations. Drawing on a different set of authors, especially Anthony Giddens, McPhee and colleagues have also developed their own approach to CCO research, as I will describe next.

McPhee's Four Flows Model

As mentioned, McPhee and colleagues' ideas are strongly grounded in Giddens' work and his theory of structuration (Brummans et al., 2011). With this theory, Giddens aimed to provide an approach that linked action and structure, and thus "to reconcile the main oppositions of social theory, between structuro-functionalist and interpretive sociologies, structure and agency, micro and macro levels of social analysis, and between objectivism and subjectivism." (Brummans et al., 2011, p. 15). Scholars who adopt the four flows perspective understand organization as being constituted of four communicative processes (*membership negotiation, reflexive self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning*) (Schoeneborn and Vásquez, 2017, p. 7-8). It is thus the combination of these four flows that produces the organization (Brummans et al., 2014). The four flow model has become a key reference for much CCO scholarship. That is, different authors have mobilized this model to understand how communication constitutes the organization through each of these flows that I will further explain in the following paragraphs.

McPhee and colleagues' model begins with the process of *membership negotiation*. In this particular process, it is through interaction that organizational members become linked and "create and maintain an organizational boundary" (Schoeneborn and Vásquez, 2017, p. 7). In addition, *membership negotiation* "occurs especially during the socialization of newcomers, which involves the negotiation of different kinds of boundaries through instruction, storytelling, dismissive reactions, as well as introduction and initiation" (McPhee & Iverson, 2009, cited in Brummans et al., 2014, p. 174).

The second flow, *reflexive self-structuring*, is linked to the design and control of organizational processes (Schoeneborn and Vásquez, 2017). Reflexive self-structuring allows organizational members to project themselves as being included in an organization through “declarative illocutionary acts” (p. 174). According to Brummans et al. (2014), “[t]his self-structuring has constitutive force, in part, because it produces a system of signs (e.g., jargon) that serve as resources for creating coherence across different discourse episodes” (p. 174).

The third flow, *activity coordination*, occurs when organizational members and groups negotiate task roles through interactions (Brummans et al., 2014, p. 174) and adapt to “situation-specific demands and expectations” (Schoeneborn and Vásquez, 2017, p. 8). Finally, the fourth flow, *institutional positioning*, refers to the diverse communication processes “through which public relations, investor relations, labor relations, etc. are managed, such as various forms of organizational ‘face-presentation’ (see Cheney & Christensen, 2001), environmental exploration, and negotiation” (Brummans et al., p. 174). It is through this last process that the organization is linked to its institutional environment.

As this brief overview shows, McPhee’s Four Flow Model’s theoretical roots differ greatly from the ones that lie at the basis of the Montréal School approach to CCO research. As I will describe next, it also differs from the “youngest” of the three CCO schools that is grounded in Niklas Luhmann’s work on social systems.

Luhmannian System Theory

The third CCO school's approach is grounded in Niklas Luhmann's sociology of organization. As Schoeneborn and Vásquez (2017) showed,

Luhmann and his followers (e.g., Stephen Blaschke, Tor Hernes, Dennis Schoeneborn, and David Seidl, among others) share the idea with other CCO scholars that communicative processes and events fundamentally constitute organizations.

Luhmann's sociology of organizations, however, is part of a larger theoretical endeavor to describe society as the dynamic and complex interplay of social systems. (p. 8)

In addition, as Jansen (2017) noted, for Luhmann (1992) and scholars associated with this particular school, "social systems are regarded as consisting of communication, and communication is something not brought forth by humans but rather by the communication itself" (p. 47). In turn, communication is a process constituted of three parts (*information*, *utterance* and *understanding*) and thus "happens when information that has been uttered is understood" (Luhmann, 2006, p. 47, cited in Brummans et al., 2014, p. 185). The social system is therefore a communicative system because it is produced when communication emerges from communication itself. It is the connection between communication events that creates the system.

Moreover, Luhmann considers that organizations are social systems that "differ from other forms of social systems (e.g., interactions on the microlevel or society at large on the macrolevel) by perpetuating their existence through a specific type of communication, what he calls "decisional communication." (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017, p. 9). Decision communication is a central element of Luhmann's conceptualization of the organization because it is when communication

concerns decisions that it assures the organization's existence and continuity. For Luhmann (2003), "organizations are social systems '*made up of decisions, and capable of completing the decisions that make them up*'" (p. 32, emphasis in original, cited in Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017, p. 9). An organization thus exists through the interconnection of decision communication events.

Today, some scholars have put efforts in bridging the gap between the three CCO schools and have shown the links between each of the pillars theoretical contributions (see Brummans et al., 2014, Cooren et al., 2011, Jansen, 2017, Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). Other scholars are even suggesting the birth of new CCO approaches such as the Boulder school that blends approaches from each of the pillars and also puts greater emphasis on critical approaches. Yet, the distinction between The Montréal School, McPhee's four flows model and the Luhmmanian school remains an important aspect of the birth of the area of research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a historical overview that shows how CCO scholarship emerged through various turns in the field of organizational communication studies, and how the birth of the three CCO schools has contributed to the development of different approaches to CCO research. What this overview does not show, though, is the extent to which CCO scholarship is gaining traction as a legitimate area of inquiry within this field, and how it is spreading to other fields. To examine this question, it will be useful to develop a theoretical framework that combines insights from neo-institutional theory with insights from research on organizational discourse, as I will show in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

Theoretical Framework: Institutionalization from a Communicative, Discursive Perspective

The meaning of the word “institution” is quite ambiguous, as Lammers and Barbour (2006) noted:

It is frequently used synonymously with organization in reference to a specific church, school, college, hospital, asylum, reformatory, mission, or corporation, especially to confer prestige or status on a particular organization. Institution has also been used to refer to supraorganizational entities or governing bodies such as the economy, the state, or a religion. A given level of aggregation has been said to be the institutional level (e.g., contrasted with the individual, group, or organizational levels). The traditional professions, such as medicine, law, and clergy, are sometimes referred to as institutions. Institution has also been used to describe specific customs and practices (e.g., the institution of marriage) as well as rules and laws (e.g., the institution of criminal justice). As an adjective, the term refers to arrangements that are fixed, established, or enduring, as in institutionalized practices. When persons become institutionalized, such as inmates, patients, or soldiers, they are generally thought to be under some compulsory rule. As slippery as the term is, in these various usages, it suggests that certain persons, organizations, beliefs, ways of thinking, behaviors, or rules have an enduring and fixed character. (pp. 357-358)

However, Lammers and Barbour (2006) observed that the word “institution” often holds a particular meaning for organizational communication scholars, “something set up or established” (p. 358), in line with the Latin root of the word. In this chapter, I will show how this particular meaning is useful, because it provides the basis for theorizing the establishment of an area of research within and beyond a field of study. In what follows, I will first explore the historical roots of institutional theory in organization studies. The work of specific scholars such as Merton, Selznick, and Parsons, I will show, led to the development of a processual view of institutions that is at the center of neo-institutional theory, the perspective I will adopt in this dissertation. After this, I will explain how the work of organizational scholars gave way to a communicative view of neo-institutional theory. I will argue, in turn, that discourse analysis provides a pertinent communicative approach to explore the establishment of an area of research such as CCO scholarship within organizational communication studies and other fields.

From Institutionalism to Neo-Institutional Theory

According to DiMaggio and Powell (1991), “institutional analysis is as old as Émile Durkheim’s exhortation to study social facts as things” (p. 1). From the late 19th century on, institutional theory held an important place in the fields of economics, political science, and sociology, but the meanings and connotations associated with the term “institution” often differed in each of these academic fields. Yet, as Scott (1995) argued, early approaches to institutions in economics, political science, and sociology “shared a common limitation” because “little attention was accorded to organizations” (p. 17). It was not until the 1940’s and early 1950’s that theorists addressed this issue and “began to recognize the existence and

importance of particular collectivities—individual organizations—entities distinguishable from both broader social institutions on the one hand and the behaviour of individuals on the other” (p. 17). In the following section of this chapter, I will show how neo-institutional theory emerged in organization studies.

Institutionalism and the Study of Organizations

Tolbert and Zucker (1996) showed how “the notion that organizations represent independent social actors in modern societal processes was not widely recognized until after the pioneering work of Merton and colleagues (see Coleman 1980; 1990)” (p. 176). Merton’s interest in bureaucratization and its impact on behavior in organizations was a precursor to institutional analysis (Scott, 1995), yet it was his student, Philip Selznick, who became one of the most influential figures in early organizational institutional work. Selznick’s processual view of institutions became particularly relevant for organizational scholars because he argued that

[i]nstitutionalization is a process. It is something that happens to an organization over time, reflecting the organization’s own distinctive history, the people who have been in it, the groups it embodies and the vested interests they have created, and the way it has adapted to its environment...In what is perhaps its most significant meaning, “to institutionalize” is to *infuse with value* beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand. (Selznick, 1957, pp. 16-17, emphasis in original, cited in Scott, 1995. p. 22)

Talcott Parson also was an important figure in institutional theory because he began to link institutions to their environment. He showed how “wider normative structures within

societies serve to legitimate the existence of organizations” (Scott, 1995, p. 24). Finally, March and Simon (1958) were very influential in institutional organizational analysis as well, because they were among the earliest scholars to illustrate the micro features of institutions and “showed how organizations shape the behaviour of participants” (Simon, 1995, p. 25).

Following the work of these and other scholars, researchers in economics, political science, and sociology increasingly began to explore the institutional aspects of organizations. This led to the birth of neo-institutional organizational analysis in these fields. However, neo-institutional organizational analysis took on very different meanings in each of these disciplines (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). For example, while neo-institutional analysis in political science was developed in reaction to the behaviorist research that dominated the field, neo-institutional sociologists drew “on developments in cognitive and cultural theory in neighboring disciplines of psychology and anthropology, as well as their home-grown subdiscipline, ethnomethodology” (Scott, 1995, p. 36). The work of organizational sociologists had the most influence on contemporary institutional research in organization studies and eventually in organizational communication, because it led “to several efforts to specify the role of institutions in the life of organizations, suggesting that institutions are (a) formal, (b) rational, (c) hierarchical, and that they (d) shape and control the structure of and action within organizations” (Lammers & Barbour, 2006, p. 359).

In what follows, I will review some of the most influential work in neo-institutional organization studies of the 1970s. This research eventually led to the birth of an organizational communication view of neo-institutional theory.

Neo-Institutional Theory in Contemporary Organization Studies

The beginning of neo-institutional analysis in contemporary organization studies can be traced back to Meyer's work (see DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 11). His now classic article, co-authored with Rowan, was particularly important to organizational studies because

Meyer and Rowan (1977) showed how the formal—that is, explicitly documented—structure of organizations could be viewed as mythical and ceremonial, rather than as meeting functional requirements of production or performance. Selznick (1957) noted that organizational practices could become “infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand” (p. 17), and Meyer and Rowan extended this idea by showing how this infusion was primarily institutional: “Institutional rules function as myths, which organizations incorporate, gaining legitimacy, resources, stability, and enhanced survival prospects” (p. 340). (Lammers & Barbour, 2006, p. 359)

In addition, Meyer and Rowan's work “offered a radical departure from conventional ways of thinking about formal structure and about the nature of organizational decision-making,” for they showed how “formal structures have symbolic as well as action-generating properties” (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996, p. 177).

In the late 1970s, scholars in organization studies began to show how institutions are not “the product of human design, the outcome of purposive actions by instrumentally oriented individuals.” Later, scholars like DiMaggio and Powell (1991) also showed “the symbolic role of formal structure (rather than informal organization)” and “treated organizations as constituted by the environment in which it was embedded” (Lammers & Garcia, 2014, p. 199).

The attention given to human activity in institutional work led to a neo-institutional approach that increasingly focus on institutionalization *processes* in organizational research. Since Selznick's (1957) early work, scholars have proposed different process-oriented definitions of institutions (see Surachaikulwattana & Phillips, 2017), but Meyer and Rowan's (1977) work was particularly important for defining institutionalization as "the process by which social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action" (p. 341). In so doing, Meyer and Rowan planted the first seeds of an organizational communication approach to institutionalization, as Lammers and Garcia (2014) noted:

from their [Meyer and Rowan] perspective, this process is driven as much by external forces as function requirements or internal organizational rationality. Their core contribution was communicative; that is organizations absorb policies and structure to signal to their environments that they are legitimate; legitimacy, in turn, serves as a symbolic resource for organizations. (p. 199-200)

It took almost 20 years, though, until Tolbert and Zucker (1996) provided a model that allowed scholars to empirically "unpack the communicative features that underlie the processes of innovation, habitualization, objectification and sedimentation" (Lammers & Garcia, 2014, p. 200). Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's (1967) work, Tolbert and Zucker (1996) offered a detailed account of the habitualization, objectification, and sedimentation phases that define the process of institutionalization.

As I mentioned in Chapter I, their model begins when an innovation is introduced to a field of practice or *institutional field*, defined as "sets of organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life; key suppliers, resource and product

consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, pp. 148-149).

Tolbert and Zucker then described the three phases of their model, starting with the habitualization phase. When an organization is confronted with a new “problem” and an innovation enters the organization in answer to this problem, they argued, the organization will generate new structural arrangements. These new arrangements subsequently become formalized “in the policies and procedures of a given organization, or a set of organizations that confront the same or similar problems” (p. 181). Tolbert and Zucker referred to this stage as the “pre-institutionalization phase,” meaning there are usually few adopters at this point because the innovation has not yet been institutionalized.

It is in the objectification phase that the innovation begins to gain more legitimacy. An important characteristic of this phase “involves the development of some degree of social consensus” (p. 182). Thus, at this point in time, organizational members, including decision-makers, attribute increased value to the innovation. More organizations within a same “institutional or organizational field” in turn begin to adopt the innovation because they agree on its legitimacy.

It is only in the sedimentation phase, though, that the innovation becomes fully institutionalized. For an innovation, whatever the form it takes, to become institutionalized, it must persist over time. In other words, for Tolbert and Zucker, the complete institutionalization of an innovation “rests on the historical continuity of structure, and especially on its survival across generations of organizational members” (p. 184). The structure or innovation must spread across multiple groups of actors and must become embedded within the institutional

field over a “lengthy period of time” (p. 184). Moreover, during the sedimentation phase, interest groups usually begin to position themselves for or against the institutionalization of the innovation.

Kuhn’s (2005) Appropriation of Tolbert and Zucker’s (1996) Model to Study Institutionalization Processes within an Academic Field

As I mentioned in Chapter I, in 2005, Kuhn showed through his analysis of the establishment of the Alta conference within organizational communication studies how useful Tolbert and Zucker’s (1996) model can be for analyzing institutionalization processes within an academic field. Interestingly, Tolbert and Zucker (1996) themselves began their theoretical argument by claiming that institutional theory has not yet become institutionalized as a legitimate area of research, yet they did not develop this idea further. Since then, only few scholars (notably Kuhn 2005, 2012; Pang, 2006) have shown the relevance of neo-institutional theory for investigating changes within academic disciplines. Most importantly, Kuhn (2005) demonstrated the value of neo-institutional framework for analyzing how the Alta conference became an “institutionalized component” (p. 619) of organizational communication studies. More particularly, Kuhn appropriated Tolbert and Zucker’s (1996) multistage model to explore the role of this conference in establishing the interpretative and critical turns within organizational communication. “[A]lthough the purpose of Kuhn’s essay was not to define an institution,” Lammers and Barbour (2006) stated, “his aim, like other communication scholars who have used the term, was to describe something that had become permanent” (p. 363).

“Once established,” Kuhn (2005) wrote, “institutions control action by enforcing upon actors norms of appropriate practice through molding extrinsic incentives and leading self-conceptions to be labeled more or less valid.” “By these means,” he continued, “the rules of legitimacy become internalized” (pp. 619-620).

Kuhn (2005) showed that the habitualization phase of the Alta conference began with the “generation of patterned approaches to problem solving (i.e., research) and the formalization and codification of such arrangements” (p. 620). At this stage, the innovation is adopted by a comparatively small group of actors who are connected to each other. The Alta conferences, Kuhn (2005) noted, were “the crystallization...of an epistemological innovation” (p. 620) in the field of organizational communication. During the habitualization stage, Kuhn suggested, “[a relatively small] group of interpretive and critical scholars discussed the uniqueness of their perspectives and addressed the challenges of disciplinary acceptance of their work” (p. 620).

Subsequently, the Alta Conference increasingly became “objectified,” because,

[w]ork on...culture and identification showed that there was a great deal of insight to be produced through this new interpretivism. At the same time, a nascent critical theory movement enabled analysis and critique of organizational configurations and processes while also inveighing against the interpretive silence on issues of power. [Hence,] lessons learned from the Alta-inspired transition enabled the field to mature and to develop a legitimate identity of its own. (pp. 622-622)

Thus, a search for legitimacy began to drive the institutionalization of Alta as an innovation at this stage and was led by “articulate spokespersons” (p. 621) who advocated the innovation and played a significant role in shaping its identity within a larger field.

Finally, during the sedimentation phase, interpretivism and critical theory spread across the field of organizational communication. With regard to the Alta conference’s sedimentation, Kuhn (2005) noted:

[A]s the story of Alta and its impacts [was] taught to new generations of graduate students as a social given (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) and as its antifunctionalist model of communication continue[d] to take hold in textbooks, the fact of multiple perspectives and of the validity of interpretive and critical views [became] increasingly engrained in the field’s consciousness. (p. 622)

Kuhn’s work was significant for understanding the establishment of important new research paradigms within organizational communication (through the establishment of the Alta conferences). However, as I mentioned in Chapter I, his brief essay only relied on anecdotes of a few scholars within this field. Hence, the role of communication in the establishment of the Alta conference still remained unclear in Kuhn’s text. By analyzing the establishment of CCO scholarship as a legitimate area of inquiry, I aim to build on and extend Kuhn’s work and thus to contribute to the development (and, yes, institutionalization!) of CCO scholarship as well as the literature that focuses on the vital role of communication in institutionalization. As mentioned in Chapter I, Lammers and Barbour (2006) noted more than 10 years ago that it is important to deepen our understanding of the communicative aspects of institutionalization processes. “[A]s individuals identify with established beliefs and

practices,” Lammers and Barbour stated, “it is day-to-day [communicative] practices enacted, endorsed, routinized, and recorded that sustain institutions” (p. 364). More recently, other scholars have made a similar argument (see Occasio, Loewenstein & Nigam, 2015; Powell & Colyvas, 2008), suggesting that we still know comparatively little about the ways in which communication plays into such processes. To enable a more refined analysis of the role of communication in the establishment of an area of inquiry like CCO scholarship, I propose to highlight the discursive nature of institutionalization processes, similar to such scholars as Cynthia Hardy and Nelson Phillips (see Hardy & Maguire, 2010; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004).

The Institutionalization of an Area of Research through Discourse

Although the term “discourse” is defined in “a variety of ways in different bodies of literature” (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 636), Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy position their work on institutionalization by defining discourse as “a system of statements which constructs an object” (Parker 1992, p. 5, cited in Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004, p. 636). Their aim is to show that “discourses ‘do not just describe things; they do things’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 6) through the way they make sense of the world for its inhabitants, giving it meanings that generate particular experiences and practices” (p. 636). For Phillips et al., it is impossible to study discourses “directly”; they can only be analyzed through the *texts* that constitute them. Put differently, discourses “are structured collections of meaningful texts (Parker, 1992)” (p. 636). “[F]or a text to be generated, it must [in turn] be inscribed—spoken, written, or depicted in some way—‘thus taking on material form and becoming accessible to others’ (Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996, p. 7)” (p. 363). Interestingly, talk is also

a form of text for Phillips and colleagues. The “texts that make up discourses,” they note, “may take a variety of forms, including written documents, verbal reports, artwork, spoken words, pictures, symbols, buildings, and other artifacts” (p. 636). In this dissertation, I make a conceptual distinction between published and public discourse, though, in order to differentiate the role of peer-reviewed articles, edited book chapters, and books from presentations, discussion during Q&A sessions, and informal conversations during conferences in the establishment of an area of research. In turn, like Phillips et al. (2004), I presume that institutions “can be understood as products of the discursive activity that influences actions” (p. 635) and that analyzing different forms of text can reveal *to what extent* an area of research like CCO scholarship is becoming “an institution” with and beyond a field of study. The following research question therefore guided the start of my empirical research:

RQ1: To what extent is CCO scholarship becoming institutionalized within organizational communication and other fields through scholars’ published and public discourse?

As I will show in Chapter V, this first part of my research reveals a number of signs that CCO scholarship has been (and is) going through Tolbert and Zucker’s (1996) institutionalization phases (habitualization, objectification, sedimentation). Hence, I sought to understand *how* this institutionalization occurs through public discourse in the second part of my research. The following research question guided this research:

RQ2: How is CCO scholarship becoming institutionalized within organizational communication and other fields through public discourse?

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained how the move from institutionalism to neo-institutional theory increasingly led scholars to study institutionalization processes. Tolbert and Zucker's (1996) work provided an important basis for investigating the role of communication in these processes. As I have shown in this chapter, Kuhn's (2005) appropriation of Tolbert and Zucker's model offers a useful starting point for examining the role of communication in the establishment of an area of research like CCO scholarship within and beyond a field, yet more conceptual and empirical research is needed to understand this role. Hence, I have proposed to zoom in on the ways in which both published and public discourse play into the institutionalization of this more or less new area of inquiry within the field of organizational communication. In the next chapter, I will explain the methods I used to conduct my empirical research and thus provide insight into the operationalization of my research questions.

CHAPTER IV

Methods

Institutional research has often been criticized for focusing on institutions that have already been “crystallized” and, as mentioned in the previous chapters, for not providing enough insight into the communicative aspects of institutionalization processes (see Lammers & Barbour, 2006). However, trying to observe these aspects introduces the methodological challenge of having to gain access to something that is *in the process of becoming institutionalized*. CCO scholarship is a relevant object of study, in this regard, because this relatively young area of inquiry has been steadily gaining legitimacy within the field of organizational communication for some time now (see Brummans et al., 2014; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011; Cooren, Vaara, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2014; Schoeneborn et al., 2014, Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). As mentioned at the end of Chapter III, what we know relatively little about, though, is the extent to which this scholarship has become established since the year 2000, as well as how this establishment occurs through different types of discourse.

As I will explain in this chapter, in line with RQ1, the aim of the first part of my research was thus to find empirical (i.e., textual in Phillips et al.’s [2004] sense) signs or markers of Tolbert and Zucker’s (1996) institutionalization phases in CCO scholars’ published (peer-reviewed articles, edited book chapters, books) discourse and public discourse (presentations, discussion during Q&A sessions, and informal conversations during an important international conference). Subsequently, I further analyzed CCO scholars’ public

discourse to understand how “conference talk” plays into the institutionalization CCO scholarship (RQ2). As I will explain, this analysis revealed that this institutionalization is for an important part fueled by scholars’ use of *pragmatic ambiguity* (Giroux, 2006) in their talk. In what follows, I will first describe my data collection methods. After this, I will describe how I analyzed these data.

Data Collection

Collection of Scholars’ Published Discourse

I conducted the first part of my research with my advisor, Dr. Boris Brummans (Université de Montréal), and Dr. James Barker (Dalhousie University). I was the lead investigator of this project, which examined to what extent CCO scholarship is becoming institutionalized by analyzing books, edited book chapters, and journal articles (published discourse) that mobilize concepts or theories from one or more of the three CCO schools (see Chapter II) and that were published between 2000 and 2015. I created our corpus by conducting systematic keyword searches in the databases of the Université de Montréal. Conference papers were excluded from this initial analysis due to the difficulty of collecting these papers in a systematic way and because these papers do not undergo the same review process as manuscripts submitted for publication.

As the term “communicative constitution of organizations” first appeared in McPhee and Zaug’s (2000; see also McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 21) article, we used the year 2000 as the starting point of our analysis. Taylor and Van Every’s (2000) influential book, *The Emergent*

Organization, was also published in this year. Work published before 2000 that could be regarded as the theoretical foundation of CCO scholarship (Taylor’s work prior to 2000 for example) was thus excluded. Moreover, we concentrated on publications that explicitly focus on the constitutive character of communication in bringing forth social collectivities and rely on the “constitutive” vocabulary that has come to characterize CCO scholarship. Because what exactly constitutes CCO research is in many ways debated, we excluded publications of scholars who did not explicitly use this constitutive vocabulary in their published work. We subsequently asked four CCO experts associated with each of the three schools (i.e., François Cooren and Consuelo Vásquez—Montréal School; Joel Iverson—Four Flows Model; and Dennis Schoeneborn—Luhmannian Systems Theory) to review our corpus and suggest additional references.

Although CCO research is published in various languages, we limited our corpus to English publications. The number of texts published in French, German, and Spanish is limited compared with the English CCO literature. In addition, many of these publications appear in journals with low impact factors (or no impact factor at all) and are rarely cited in the main peer-reviewed journals that publish CCO research. For these reasons, we limited our analysis to English-language publications, which did include English-language publications by scholars from French, German, and Spanish speaking countries who have been making significant contributions to CCO research’s emergence and institutionalization (e.g., see Schoeneborn & Sandhu, 2013).

Collection of Scholars' Public Discourse

To examine the role of public discourse in CCO scholarship's institutionalization (see RQ1 and RQ2), I recorded "conference talk" during the meeting of the European Group of Organizational Studies (EGOS), which took place in Athens, Greece in the summer of 2015. This conference marked the beginning of the first official EGOS standing working group, entitled "SWG 05: Organization as Communication"—SWG 05 will be active until the summer of 2018. Since 2015, SWG 05 has been organizing subthemes related to the communicative constitution of organization at the annual EGOS conference—the very first CCO subtheme, however, was organized at the 2012 EGOS conference in Helsinki, which was followed by another CCO subtheme at the 2013 EGOS conference in Montréal.

The 2015 EGOS subtheme was called "The Performative Power of Talk" and was an important event that brought together organizational communication scholars who associate themselves with one (or more) of the three CCO schools, as well as scholars from various other fields. The three-day meeting provided a unique opportunity to investigate the role of public discourse in CCO scholarship's institutionalization. The subtheme consisted of 13 90-minute sessions and comprised 37 presentations, including one keynote speech by Philippe Lorino. Each presentation lasted 15 minutes and was followed by a 15-minute discussion except for the keynote speech that lasted 1 hour and was followed by a 30-minute discussion.

Throughout the event, I observed as a participant (see Spradley, 1980) scholars' public discourse. I audio recorded 19 of the 37 presentations as well as their subsequent discussions, yielding more than 10 hours of recording. Because I also presented a paper for this subtheme, I participated actively in many of the sessions. Besides relying on audio recording, I kept track

of what was happening during the sessions by taking detailed ethnographic field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). These notes mostly focused on capturing contextual information. Every evening, I also wrote more detailed notes in my fieldwork journal to keep track of my own reflections and impressions. Moreover, I collected documents that were relevant for the analysis of scholars' public discourse, such as the actual papers that were presented during the conference. I did not systematically analyze the content of these papers, yet they were vital for understanding what people said during their presentations, how they responded to questions, and so forth. I also kept a copy of the subtheme program that contained the authors' names, paper titles, as well as the names of session chairs and discussants. These data allowed me to check who was presenting, their university affiliation, and so on.

Data Analysis

I conducted two different types of analysis to examine RQ1 and RQ2. In what follows, I will begin by describing how I identified empirical markers of CCO scholarship's habitualization, objectification, and sedimentation (see Kuhn, 2005; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996) in CCO publications (published discourse) and the 2015 EGOS conference talk (public discourse). After this, I will explain how I thematically analyzed CCO scholars' public discourse to gain insight into RQ2.

Identification of Markers of CCO Scholarship's Institutionalization in Published and Public Discourse

Analysis of published CCO discourse. Using the abovementioned selection criteria and CCO expert suggestions, we identified 206 CCO publications (see appendix for the complete corpus). We analyzed each publication based on 11 categories in an Excel spreadsheet and computed simple frequency counts. Together, these categories reveal specific aspects of (Kuhn's appropriation of) Tolbert and Zucker's institutionalization model and provide a portrait of CCO scholarship's trajectory from 2000 to 2015 (see RQ1).

Specifically, we regarded the number of published empirical studies and the degree to which authors specified their research methods as empirical markers of CCO scholarship's habituation phase. Examining these aspects allowed us to determine the extent to which CCO scholarship is developing "patterned approaches to problem solving" (Kuhn, 2005, p. 620) and formalizing these approaches. This part of our analysis also provided insight into the main problems or questions that appear to drive CCO scholarship.

Next, we analyzed the increase of CCO publications since 2000, the contributions of CCO champions, the proliferation of CCO theories and concepts to study different topics, and scholars' positioning within one of the three CCO schools, to gain insight into Tolbert and Zucker's objectification phase. Hence, we regarded these aspects as empirical markers of CCO scholarship's increased popularity and of champions' efforts to position CCO scholarship as an area of inquiry with "a legitimate identity of its own" (Kuhn, 2005, pp. 621-622).

To examine the sedimentation stage, we investigated authors' institutional affiliations and their main academic disciplinary homes (organizational communication, management, organization studies, etc.), because these aspects reveal how CCO scholarship is becoming more established within organizational communication and beyond. That is, we regarded the expansion of CCO scholarship to academic institutions outside of North America and to fields beyond organizational communication as markers of sedimentation, because such developments show that scholars from different parts of the world and from various disciplines are adopting this approach to doing organizational research. Their appropriation of CCO scholarship thus contributes to establishing this area of inquiry. We also analyzed peer-reviewed journals in which CCO research is published and their impact factors to provide insight into this stage, presuming that publishing in reputable journals with a high impact factor is a sign that CCO scholarship is becoming increasingly valued.

Analysis of public CCO discourse during the 2015 EGOS conference. Analyzing the participant observation data I collected during the 2015 EGOS conference provided further insight into RQ1, because it enabled me to identify additional empirical markers of CCO scholarship's institutionalization.

First, I identified the actors who participated in the CCO subtheme. As suggested, an important aspect of the institutionalization process is the extent to which actors adopt the innovation that is introduced into a field of practice (see Kuhn, 2005). During the habitualization phase, adoption is limited to a certain set of actors, but as the innovation becomes more established, additional actors start to embrace it. To analyze who participated in the conference, I created a second Excel spreadsheet that was similar to the one used for the analysis of CCO publications. In this spreadsheet, I categorized the first authors of each of the

papers that were presented by country of origin and field of study. I then identified if they were Ph.D. students, post-doctoral scholars, research professionals, assistant, associate, or full professors. This analysis gave me additional insight into the extent to which CCO scholarship had been adopted by a variety of actors and the extent to which it had spread to fields beyond organizational communication. In particular, it allowed me to identify signs of the area of research's habitualization and sedimentation.

Subsequently, I added the convenors and chairs of the subtheme and scholars acting as discussants in each of the sessions to the Excel spreadsheet. Analyzing who enacted these authoritative roles provided further insight into the objectification of CCO scholarship. As mentioned, this phase shows increased consensus regarding the value and legitimacy of an innovation. The convenors, chairs, and discussants were people who are recognized, legitimate scholars in the field of organizational communication and/or management and organization studies and in CCO scholarship, so I considered their willingness to associate themselves with the subtheme as a sign that this area of research has been gaining legitimacy.

In addition, I considered the creation of the CCO standing working group as an important marker of CCO's objectification. The very existence of this subtheme indicates that CCO scholarship has gained a level of legitimacy within organization studies as well as organizational communication studies because EGOS is an important and influential association in both these fields. It therefore reinforces the objectification of this area of inquiry within these disciplines. Finally, I took into consideration the presence of scholars who discussed the translation of CCO research into practice as a sign of the area of research's sedimentation.

Together with the markers identified in our analysis of the CCO literature, these markers thus provided rich insight into the extent to which CCO scholarship has been gaining traction within organizational communication and other fields (RQ1). However, this analysis did not provide insight into how CCO scholarship is becoming institutionalized through public discourse. To examine this second research question, I conducted an inductive, thematic analysis, as I will explain next.

Thematic Analysis of Scholars' Public Discourse

I began this specific part of the analysis by listening multiple times to the recorded data. This allowed me to identify specific moments within each of the recorded conference sessions that potentially could reveal how scholars' discourse contributes to CCO scholarship's institutionalization. I then carefully transcribed the data. I also included nonverbal and contextual notes that seemed potentially useful for this specific analysis. Subsequently, I conducted a thematic analysis (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) to analyze these transcripts.

As Brummans, Hwang, and Cheong (2013) noted, "Thematic analysis is a popular type of inductive analysis that provides an appropriate method for systematically uncovering structural or thematic aspects in accounts of lived experience" (p. 355). That is, thematic analyses "primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). In my thematic analysis, I relied on the open, axial, and selective coding techniques that Strauss and Corbin (1990; see also Corbin & Strauss, 2008) describe in their explanation of

grounded theory, because these techniques “provide a robust set of well-tested analytical procedures for developing in-depth insights into a phenomenon” (Brummans et al. 2013, p. 355).

Specifically, these techniques enabled me to see important connections between Tolbert and Zucker’s (1996) institutionalization process and Hélène Giroux’s (2006) notion of *pragmatic ambiguity*. That is, during the open coding phase, I compared the transcripts of the recorded sessions with the observations in my fieldwork journal by reading them multiple times. This allowed me to identify general categories or themes that were recurrent in the data. Ryan and Bernard (2003) noted that there are multiple ways to identify themes in qualitative research. In this analysis, I used what the authors would call the “constant comparison method.” Citing Glaser and Strauss (1967), they explained that this specific method “involves searching for similarities and differences by making systematic comparisons across units of data” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 91). Thus, I was able to identify similarities in the way conference participants presented their CCO research; how they zoomed in on particular theoretical/conceptual or methodological issues during their presentations or during subsequent discussions; and how they positioned CCO scholarship vis-à-vis more traditional organizational communication research or other kinds of research. Subsequently, axial coding allowed me to conceptually link the themes I began to define through open coding. During this stage, I discovered that EGOS conference participants were frequently ambiguous in their talk about theoretical/conceptual or methodological issues, as well as in the way they positioned their CCO research. This led me to Giroux’s (2006) concept of *pragmatic ambiguity*—and its three modalities of *ambiguity*, *vagueness*, and *generality* (see the start of Chapter VI for a detailed explication of these terms)—which helped me explain how scholars’ pragmatic use of ambiguity plays into CCO scholarship’s habitualization and objectification. Hence, during the

final, selective coding stage of this analysis, I used the notion of pragmatic ambiguity as the key concept for integrating my themes and connected it to the first two phases in Tolbert and Zucker's (1996) institutionalization model.

Conclusion

Together, the data collection and analysis methods I have described in this chapter enabled me to develop well-informed answers to my research questions. As mentioned, in the first part of this research, I examined the extent to which CCO scholarship has become institutionalized within organizational communication and other fields through an in-depth analysis of published and public discourse. Based on this analysis, I then further explored the public discourse practices that contribute to this institutionalization process by focusing on the ways in which participants at the 2015 EGOS conference pragmatically used ambiguity in their talk. In Chapter V, I will present the insights into my first research question. The insights into my second research question will be presented in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER V

Signs of CCO Scholarship's Institutionalization in Published and Public Discourse

In this chapter, I will show to what extent CCO scholarship is becoming institutionalized within organizational communication and other fields through scholars' published and public discourse. That is, I will show how my analysis of these discourses reveals signs of CCO scholarship's habitualization, objectification, and sedimentation.

Analysis of Published CCO Discourse³

Signs of Habitualization

Increase in empirical publications. Depending on the source consulted, the origins of CCO scholarship can arguably be traced to Taylor's (1988) book, *L'Organisation n'est qu'un Tissu de Communication* [*The Organization is but a Web of Communication*]. While Taylor had argued that organizations are communicative phenomena for many years prior to 1988, this book marks the seed of this emerging area of inquiry. The specific framing that

³ This section has already been published in the journal *Management Communication Quarterly*; see Boivin, G., Brummans, B. H. J. M., & Barker, J. R. (2017). The institutionalization of CCO scholarship: Trends from 2000 to 2015. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 31(3) 331–355. doi: 10.1177/0893318916687396

communication constitutes organizations first appeared, however, in McPhee and Zaug's 2000 article, "The Communicative Constitution of Organizations." Between then and 2015, 206 articles and book chapters were published, including McPhee and Zaug's seminal text.

Examining the number of theoretical and empirical texts published in this period shows an increase in empirical publications over time—of the 206 publications assessed, 135 were theoretical, three were literature reviews, and 68 were empirical studies. The analysis I conducted indicates that theoretical publications played a more significant role in constituting CCO scholarship than empirical ones before 2006. Since 2006, empirical work has been growing in popularity (63 of the 68 empirical texts or 92.6% of them were published in or after 2006). This finding suggests that from 2000 until 2005, CCO scholarship was still "under construction" as an area of inquiry. During this period, CCO research was a "novelty" at the start of its institutionalization within organizational communication and little known outside this field. Hence, during these years, CCO "pioneers" like Cooren, McPhee, Taylor, and Van Every put effort into developing and clarifying their theories and concepts. These pioneers were driven by the lack of organizational communication theories that explained what an organization is and how it emerges. In turn, they sought to address problems related to, respectively, the privileging of human agency in organizing processes (Cooren), the inattention to the different types of communication through which organizations are constituted (McPhee), and the absence of theory to explicate the properties of communication through which organizations emerge in interaction (Taylor and Van Every).

Other scholars began to explore and apply these CCO theories and concepts to diverse empirical contexts as CCO scholarship became known within organizational communication.

This heightened interest in operationalizing the work of early CCO pioneers suggests that CCO scholarship became increasingly formalized. To date, scholars nevertheless continue to debate ontological questions about what constitutes CCO scholarship and what gives this area of research its own legitimate identity within organizational communication (e.g., see Bisel, 2010; Brummans et al., 2014; Schoeneborn et al., 2014) as well as management and organization studies (e.g., see Cooren et al., 2011). Moreover, we noted a lack of methodological explicitness and clarity, which may hinder the development of *patterned* approaches to the aforementioned problems that lie at the heart of CCO scholarship.

Lack of methodological explicitness and clarity. Our analysis indicates that 59 of the 68 (86.8%) empirical publications used what we could call a “naturalistic or (quasi-) ethnographic approach” to data collection, involving participant and/or non-participant observation, shadowing, semi-structured interviews, and/or the collection of archives/texts (sometimes a combination of these methods). Some publications were fairly straightforward in explicating their data collection methods, but many were imprecise or even vague. For example, some authors only stated that the data were collected through ethnographic methods. Others mentioned the type of data they collected without describing the process that guided their methodological choices. Only two publications relied on quantitative data collection methods such as surveys.

In terms of data analysis, most of the empirical publications (37 or 54.4%) used a combination of conversation, discourse, and/or interaction analysis. The distinction between these approaches was not always clear, however, and terms such as “conversation analysis,” “discourse analysis,” and “interaction analysis” were often used interchangeably or

synonymously. Moreover, many authors did not specify their type of analysis at all. A smaller number of publications (21 or 30.9%) relied on other qualitative methods such as thematic analysis or narrative analysis, and the use of quantitative analyses remains very rare.

Without the explication of clear data collection and analysis methods (in methods articles, chapters, or even complete books), graduate students and faculty must themselves determine how to operationalize the plethora of theories and concepts various CCO scholars have proposed (see next subsection). Developing robust CCO methods or even full-fledged methodologies and applying them consistently therefore seems key to CCO scholarship's institutionalization, because this methodological detail will enable students and faculty to grasp how organizational phenomena can be systematically observed and analyzed from different constitutive perspectives. Such formalization should not suppress the diversity of methods that CCO scholars are mobilizing, which may be one of CCO scholarship's strengths; it should rather focus on clarifying the application of methods and on the synergies that may result from combining them.

Signs of Objectification

Increase in CCO publications. More than half of the 206 publications in our corpus (145/70.4%) appeared between 2009 and 2015. We can only speculate about what contributed to this rising interest in CCO research during this period. Putnam and Nicotera's (2009) book, *Building Theories of Organization: The Constitutive Role of Communication*, may be partly responsible for the expansion of CCO scholarship. What should also not be overlooked is the

influence of Biesel's (2010) *Management Communication Quarterly* forum on CCO scholarship to which several respected organizational communication scholars and scholars from other fields (Sewell, Sillince, and Reed) contributed, although some were rather critical of CCO research. Furthermore, the papers presented during the 2008 "What Is an Organization?" conference in honor of James Taylor and subsequently published in Robichaud and Cooren's (2013) edited book, *Organization and Organizing*, should be taken into account. This book also included contributions by a number of well-known scholars (e.g., Czarniawska, Latour, McPhee, Nicotera, Putnam, Taylor, and Tsoukas) as well as graduate students. Finally, recent reviews and discussions of CCO scholarship (i.e., Brummans et al., 2014; Cooren et al., 2011; Schoeneborn et al., 2014) may have played a key role in "objectifying" this area of inquiry.

Increase in publications by champions. Cooren and Taylor published, alone or with coauthors, 75 of the 206 CCO publications (36.4%), showing their considerable influence on CCO scholarship—at least if measured by the sheer quantity of their work. These authors have also published in a variety of journals in (organizational) communication studies, linguistics/discourse studies, management, and organization studies. Moreover, they have collaborated with scholars from many different fields. Cooren and Taylor may thus be regarded as "champions who advance convincing theoretical arguments" (Kuhn, 2005, p. 621) because their efforts contribute significantly to establishing CCO scholarship as a legitimate area of inquiry within organizational communication and beyond.

Proliferation of theories, concepts, and topics. Leading CCO scholars, each associated with one of the aforementioned schools (the Montréal School, Four Flows Model, and Luhmannian Systems Theory), have proposed an impressive number of theories and concepts. For example, those associated with McPhee's Four Flows Model explore the concepts of organizational *self-structuring*, *membership negotiation*, *activity coordination*, and *institutional positioning*, which are grounded in Giddens's (1984) structuration theory, as I mentioned in Chapter II (15 publications). Drawing on Latour's (2005) actor–network theory, Weick's (1979) theory of organizing, and Greimas's (1989) narratology (see Chapter II), scholars associated with the Montréal School investigate concepts such as *agency* (31 publications), *conversation/text* (25 publications), *ventriloquism* (13 publications), *presentification* (six publications), and *co-orientation* (five publications). Drawing on Luhmann's (1995) writings (see Chapter II), Luhmannians focus on systems (three publications), often in combination with concepts such as *autopoiesis*, *communicative episodes*, *decision making*, and *operational closure*. These concepts have, in turn, been used to investigate a number of different topics, such as accounting (Fauré, Brummans, Giroux, & Taylor, 2010; Varey, 2006), authority (Benoit-Barné, & Cooren, 2009), collective mind (Cooren, 2004, 2006a; McPhee, Myers, & Trethewey, 2006), conflict (Güney, 2006), interorganizational collaboration (Arnaud, & Mills, 2012; Koschmann, 2013), mindful organizing (Brummans, Hwang, & Cheong, 2013), organizational identity (Cornelissen, Christensen, & Kinuthia, 2012; Piette, 2013), organizational learning (Bisel, Messersmith, & Kelley, 2012; Browning, Sitkin, Sutcliffe, Obstfeld, & Greene, 2000; Matte & Cooren, 2015), spacing and timing (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2004; Cooren, Fox, Robichaud, & Talih, 2005;

Vásquez, & Cooren, 2013), strategy (Fauré, & Rouleau, 2011), and tensions (Cooren, Matte, Benoit-Barné, & Brummans, 2013; Koschmann, 2010).

This rather large breadth of topics shows that CCO theories and concepts are widely applicable, yet each of these subjects has only been investigated in a few empirical studies—frequently just one empirical CCO study. To gain more legitimacy as an area of inquiry, more concerted, systematic CCO research is needed. Such rigor and systematization will also help clarify what each of the CCO schools is “bringing to the table” in terms of studying these topics, as well as their (in)commensurabilities. Consequently, students and faculty will better understand the (dis)advantages of adopting a specific approach to studying the communicative constitution of organizations (or of combining approaches). Currently, these (dis)advantages may not always be clear, which may partly explain why relatively few scholars position themselves explicitly within one of the three schools (or within a combination of schools).

Absence of explicit positioning within CCO schools. Although the existence of the CCO schools can be taken as a sign of CCO scholarship’s objectification, our analysis reveals that scholars aligned themselves with a school in only 48 of the 206 publications (23.3%). That is, authors infrequently made statements such as, “In this article, we adopt a Montréal School approach to...” Those who did position themselves primarily identified with the Montréal School (29 publications, compared with 13 publications by scholars who identified with McPhee’s Four Flows Model; and six publications by scholars who identified with Luhmannian Systems Theory). This suggests that elucidating the unique contributions of each school may help advance CCO scholarship’s objectification because it will strengthen the pillars that constitute this area of inquiry and give it “a legitimate identity of its own” (Kuhn,

2005, pp. 621-622). Further clarifying these contributions may also stimulate the development of new schools of thought that emerge as extensions and adaptations of the three existing schools. Some argue, for example, that the work of CCO scholars affiliated with the University of Colorado Boulder should be regarded as a school of thought itself, one that blends various aspects of the other schools yet also adds its own critical perspective.

Signs of Sedimentation

Diversity of authors' institutional affiliations. The emergence of CCO scholarship has often been associated with North American institutions. Examining whether scholars outside North America have begun to take interest in this research provides one indicator of how this scholarship has started to “sediment” within organizational communication and spread to other disciplines. Our analysis reveals that, to date, scholars affiliated with North American institutions publish most CCO research (151 texts or 73.3% of our corpus). Between 2010 and 2015, however, CCO scholarship expanded to continental Europe and the United Kingdom—first authors affiliated with universities in continental Europe published 48 texts since 2000; 42 of these (87.5%) appeared between 2010 and 2015. In France, for example, authors have only recently begun to take an active interest in publishing CCO research: Seven (English) articles and/or book chapters were published by scholars who work in French institutions between 2010 and 2015. This French interest may partly be explained by the Montréal School's influence, because its affiliated scholars publish in English as well as French and much of their work “interlinks American pragmatism with ‘European pragmatism’ by appropriating texts from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean that centralize the

consequentiality of action in a world of interactivity” (Brummans, 2006, p. 203). Scholars in Australia and New Zealand have also begun to take interest in CCO scholarship (we found six publications in total). Moreover, we only found one English-language publication by a scholar affiliated with an Asian institution and no English-language publications by scholars affiliated with institutions in other parts of the world.

Diversity of authors’ disciplinary homes. Authors’ disciplinary homes also provide insight into CCO scholarship’s proliferation within organizational communication and other fields. Currently, CCO research remains more popular in the field of organizational communication (98 publications) than in any other discipline, supporting the claim that CCO scholarship has created an important niche within this discipline. Management and organization scholars, however, show increasing interest in CCO related topics and questions (39 publications by first authors affiliated with business schools appeared between 2006 and 2015), and two CCO publications were authored by scholars in sociology.

The increased popularity of CCO research beyond organizational communication can partly be explained by the number of communication scholars who are now affiliated with business schools such as Copenhagen Business School (e.g., Blaschke, Christensen, and Schoeneborn) or Rotterdam School of Management (e.g., Cornelissen). Furthermore, articles and chapters written by well-known management and organization scholars and sociologists in Cooren et al.’s (2011) special issue of *Organization Studies* on “Communication, Organizing and Organization,” or in edited books like Robichaud and Cooren’s (2013) *Organization and Organizing*, contribute to cementing CCO scholarship as a more or less distinct area of inquiry within the aforementioned disciplines.

Increase in peer-reviewed publications. Publication of CCO research in reputable peer-reviewed journals is another indicator of the extent to which CCO scholarship is becoming established. In total, 71 of the 206 CCO texts in our corpus were books or book chapters, leaving 135 academic articles. Most of these articles appeared in peer-reviewed journals with a significant impact factor, ranging from 9.741 to 0.331 (note, all impact factors reported are from 2016). The journals with the highest impact factors were *The Academy of Management Annals* (9.741) and *Academy of Management Review* (7.288). Only 15 papers (11.1%) were published in journals with no clear impact factor reported on their official website, such as *Journal of Communication Management* or *Canadian Journal of Communication*.

Some journals play a particularly important role in establishing CCO scholarship as an area of inquiry. Of the 135 journal articles, 42 were published in *Management Communication Quarterly* (impact factor: 1.865, representing 31.1% of CCO journal articles and 20.4% of the entire corpus). Interestingly, 34 of these articles (81%) appeared in or after 2009, again suggesting that CCO scholarship started to “take off” around this time. Journals outside of organizational communication, such as *Organization Studies* (impact factor: 2.798), have also played a significant role in CCO scholarship’s gradual establishment (12 publications appeared here; 10 between 2011 and 2015). In fact, three other outlets with high impact factors in management and organization studies have contributed to the proliferation of CCO scholarship, even though only a few articles appeared in these journals: *Human Relations* published five articles (impact factor: 2.619), *Academy of Management Review* (impact factor: 7.288) published three articles, and *The Academy of Management Annals* (impact factor: 9.741) two articles. These results indicate that CCO research is gaining more traction, and thus legitimacy and influence, in other disciplines. The

fact that CCO scholars are also publishing edited books with reputable academic publishers such as Oxford University Press and Routledge provides additional support for this claim.

Analysis of Public CCO Discourse

Signs of Habitualization

Country of origin and disciplinary affiliation of first authors. As mentioned, during the habitualization stage, a limited set of actors adopts the innovation (see Kuhn, 2005). My analysis of the actors who participated in 2015 EGOS subtheme 16 “The Performative Power of Talk” provides interesting insights into this part of CCO scholarship’s institutionalization. In particular, my analysis reveals that in 2015, there was still some exclusivity in terms of who participated in this subtheme.

The subtheme comprised 37 presentations (including one keynote speech). The first authors of the papers that were presented came from a small number of continents and countries. In total, 11 authors (29,7%) were affiliated with North American institutions (eight or 21,6% from Canada and three or 8,1% from the U.S.), and 27 (73%) with European institutions. I also noticed that the presenters from European institutions worked in a small number of countries: eight (29,6%) in France, five (18,5%) in Denmark, four (14,8%) in England, three (11,1%) in Finland, two (7,4%) in Switzerland, one (3,7%) in Greece, one (3,7%) in Germany, one (3,7%) in Ireland, one (3,7%) in the Netherlands, and one (3,7%) in Italy. No first author affiliated with Latin American, African, or Asian institutions participated in the subtheme,

thus showing how CCO scholarship's habitualization process is predominantly occurring in North America and Europe.

Over the years, the EGOS association has gained international recognition and is known as a diverse association. The group counts over 2,500 members from 54 different countries (see EGOS website, 2017). However, the data collected during the 2015 EGOS subtheme 16 sessions does not reflect this diversity in terms of first authors' origins. It instead suggests that CCO scholarship had not begun to spread outside of North America and Europe in 2015—and it seems that within Europe, the subtheme had not gained much recognition outside countries such as France, Denmark, and England at the time. This implies that in 2015, there was still a sense of exclusivity in terms of who adopted CCO scholarship, which can be seen as a sign that CCO scholarship was still in its habitualization phase.

Moreover, EGOS is known for welcoming participants from a large number of disciplines. As the EGOS website (2017) states,

EGOS has its identity and intellectual roots in the social sciences. It encourages an analytical and theoretical approach towards organizations. EGOS embraces diversity of all kinds including a pluralistic approach to understanding organizations from the perspective of the social sciences (such as sociology, social history, political science, psychology and anthropology) as well as the humanities (such as philosophy, discourse analysis, literary criticism and rhetoric).

My analysis suggests, however, that also this kind of diversity was not represented by subtheme 16 in 2015: 26 of the 37 presenters (70,3%) were affiliated with business schools, 10

(27%) with departments of communication, and only one (2,7%) with a department of education (more specifically the field of psychology). These results suggest that in 2015, CCO scholarship was still in many ways exclusive to management and organization studies, as well as organizational communication studies.

Signs of Objectification

Creation of the EGOS standing working group. The actual existence and creation of the EGOS CCO standing working group in 2015 imply that CCO scholarship has gained a level of legitimacy within organizational communication studies as well as management and organization studies. As mentioned, EGOS is an important association that publishes *Organization Studies*, a well-respected peer-reviewed journal with a high impact factor. As I already mentioned, the association has over 2,500 members from 54 countries and its annual conference is considered to be one of the main academic events in management and organization studies as well as organizational communication studies—the annual meeting of the *Academy of Management* being *the* main academic event in the field of management and organization. Hence, the creation and existence of an official CCO standing group can be seen as a sign of CCO scholarship's objectification, because it reinforces its status as a legitimate area of inquiry within various disciplines.

Presence of well-known scholars. Moreover, the presence of well-known scholars acting as convenors, chairs, and/or discussants also shows that CCO research has been gaining more legitimacy. For example, François Cooren, whom I showed in my analysis of the

published CCO discourse can be seen as a “champion” in the institutionalization of CCO scholarship, was one of the convenors of the subtheme and also chaired four sessions. Dennis Schoeneborn, who is associated with the birth of the Luhmannian CCO school of thought, played a similar role. He was also one of the convenors of the subtheme and chaired five sessions.

But perhaps most revealing in terms of objectification was the presence of established scholars in the fields of organizational communication and/or management and organization who do not identify themselves as “CCO scholars” *per se* (or are recognized as such). That is, three established scholars affiliated with important academic institutions in France (Philippe Lorino, ESSEC Business School), Denmark (Dan Kärreman, Copenhagen Business School) and the USA (Linda Putnam, University of California, Santa Barbara) acted as discussants. Putnam is among the most cited authors in organizational communication studies (according to Google Scholar, her work has been cited 15,215 times). Kärreman is a much-cited scholar in management and organization studies (his work has been cited 6,822 times, according to Google Scholar). Lorino is a celebrated organization theorist who also acted as the subtheme’s keynote speaker and discussant. While Lorino does not have a Google Scholar profile, Google Scholar shows that his work has been frequently cited, too. For example, his book, *Le Contrôle de Gestion Stratégique: La Gestion par les Activités* (1991), has been cited 467 times. These well-known scholars’ willingness to associate themselves with the CCO subtheme is another indicator that CCO scholarship was gaining more legitimacy in 2015.

Moreover, personal reactions from those who presented their work during the subtheme showed how the presence of these reputable scholars contributed to giving legitimacy to CCO scholarship. For example, one emerging scholar, explained to me during

the conference that she was very proud that one of these scholars attended her presentation. As I wrote in my fieldwork journal on July 4, 2015,

It is interesting to see how some people give importance to who attended their presentation. Some people seem very proud to have some specific scholars there because they feel that their comments will be very relevant. Their mere presence adds weight and legitimacy to their work.

So, examples like these show the influence of reputable scholars “outside” CCO scholarship who recognize the value CCO scholarship as an “innovation” and are willing to acknowledge this through their attendance as well as through their verbal expressions in the role of official discussants and speakers.

Signs of Sedimentation

Diversity of first authors. In terms of the sedimentation of CCO scholarship, its increased establishment within organizational communication studies and persistence in time add its spreading to other fields, I found that 11 (29,7%) of the 37 papers presented during the 2015 EGOS conference were written by Ph.D. students. Only three of these students were, at the time, being advised by scholars associated with one of the three CCO schools. This means that seven of the student presenters were somewhat new to CCO scholarship.

These results show that even if though CCO scholarship was still relatively exclusive as an area of research, it seemed to be opening up in 2015. The number of students

representing 29,7% of the overall presentations is particularly revealing because it suggests that we can eventually expect to see a greater number of CCO dissertations as well as, consequently, an increase in CCO publications, written by future professors or researchers. As Kuhn (2005) suggested, familiarizing graduate students with new research paradigms (or, in the case of this dissertation, a new area of research) is very important for the sedimentation of such paradigms (or an area of inquiry like CCO scholarship). The active participation of students at the EGOS conference shows that this familiarization was well under way in 2015, so CCO research was becoming “increasingly engrained in the...consciousness [of organizational communication studies and spreading to other fields]” (Kuhn, 2005, p. 622).

Discussion on the translation of CCO research into practice. Finally, the presence at 2015 EGOS subtheme of two scholars mobilizing an “action-research” methodological lens and one scholar arguing for a “prescriptive CCO model”, can also be seen a sign of CCO scholarship’s sedimentation. CCO research has been criticized for being too theoretical and for being difficult to appropriate by organizational practitioners (e.g., see Bisel, 2010; Kuhn, 2008). Consequently, some CCO scholars have become concerned about finding ways to translate CCO scholarship into organizational practice. For instance, several sessions during recent International Communication Association (ICA) and EGOS conferences explored this question (e.g., see the 2014 “Organization as communication’ in practice: bridging academic and professional interests in the communicative constitution of organizations” at the 2014 EGOS conference or the recent “Roundtable Discussion on the Communicative Constitution of Organization (CCO) and Practice Interventions” at the 2017 ICA conference).

The 2015 EGOS conference also reflected the preoccupation of translating CCO in practice. For example, in one presentation, the scholars described how in one organization where they were doing their fieldwork, they discovered that multiple approaches had been used in the past to explore a specific organizational problem. Yet, none of the approaches had been successful for the organizational members until they reflected on what they called a “gap between talk and action”. After the two authors’ presentation, the discussion unfolded as follows:

Sophie⁴: So, did they come with that? Saying we have a gap between talk and action or....

Simon: Not in that kind of descript but you know they said we are doing (...) all this time they had done cultural analysis, they had done interphase workshops, they had done process optimization, they had done really all organization development interventions strategies. There were even words we were not allowed to use anymore like process optimization, you can’t, you can’t talk about that because we have already done something like that and I was almost at the point where I said, if you don’t want to be (inaudible) then leave me alone. And then I got this idea and we started it.

Sophie: I think that is really interesting because it came from, from the organization itself but then you framed it that way and that triggered. I thought it was really, really interesting.

⁴ To protect conference participants’ identity, I decided to use pseudonyms in my transcripts of their conference talk.

Thus, although the number of papers that focused on applying CCO thinking scholarship to/in professional contexts was rather small during the 2015 EGOS conference, the mere fact that it became a topic of conversation/discussion can be seen as yet another empirical marker of CCO scholarship's sedimentation, because it shows that CCO scholarship slowly started to spread outside *academic* fields, a process that had already started the year before, through the EGOS preconference on "CCO in Practice" at Erasmus University in the Netherlands.

Conclusion

The analyses of published and public CCO discourse I have presented in this chapter reveal multiple signs that CCO scholarship has become increasingly institutionalized as a legitimate area of research. However, in view of Tolbert and Zucker's (1996) model, these analyses also suggest that CCO scholarship is also still going through processes of habitualization, objectification, and sedimentation. The significant increase in publications between 2009 and 2015, the increase in publications by "CCO champions," the proliferation of concepts in publications, the creation of the EGOS standing working group, and the presence of well-known scholars at the 2015 conference show that CCO scholarship has been gaining legitimacy since the term "CCO" first appeared in 2000. Moreover, the diversity of authors, the increase in peer-reviewed publications and the interest in translating CCO scholarship into practice suggest that this area of research is spreading. Then again, the lack of formalization of CCO research and the homogeneity of participants at the EGOS conference also suggest that CCO scholarship has not yet gone beyond Tolbert and Zucker's habitualization phase.

Moreover, the analyses I have presented in this chapter also reveal some contradicting signs of CCO scholarship's institutionalization. For instance, the analysis of the published discourse reveals that the authors of publications are diverse in terms of their institutional affiliations, which can be seen as a sign of sedimentation. However, the analysis of the public discourses shows that the participants at the 2015 EGOS conference were still very limited to a small number of disciplines. Both analyses also show that the area of research has not begun to spread outside North America and Europe. Thus, while there are multiple signs of CCO scholarship's objectification and sedimentation the area of research remains in many ways exclusive to certain actors.

So, now that I have provided insight into the extent to which CCO scholarship is becoming institutionalized through scholars' published and public discourse (RQ1), I will turn to examining how this institutionalization happens through public discourse (RQ2). The next chapter provides insight into this question, based on an in-depth analysis of participants' conference talk during the 2015 EGOS conference in Athens.

CHAPTER VI

The Role of Pragmatic Ambiguity in CCO Scholarship's Institutionalization

In this chapter, I will show how scholars' public discourse plays into CCO scholarship's institutionalization (RQ2) by analyzing scholars' discourse at the 2015 EGOS conference. More specifically, I will analyze how conference participants' pragmatic use of ambiguity (Giroux, 2006) plays into this institutionalization. Giroux (2006) defined pragmatic ambiguity as "the condition of admitting more than one course of action" (p. 1229; see also Castor, 2017). As I will show, the pragmatic use of ambiguity as well as the *questioning* of ambiguity during the conference contributed to the habitualization and objectification of CCO scholarship, because it allowed scholars to formalize their theoretical claims and increase the legitimacy of CCO research.

This chapter is structured as follows: I will start by defining Giroux's (2006) notion of pragmatic ambiguity. There are multiple ways to define the concept of ambiguity. As Castor noted (2017), in the field of organizational communication, "the diversity of ways to conceptualize ambiguity reflects the historical and theoretical development of how organizational communication itself has been conceptualized in functional, interpretive, critical, and postmodern perspectives" (p. 1). In this chapter, I define ambiguity from a post-modernist perspective. "Postmodernism," as Castor states, "helps to reconceptualize the relationship between ambiguity and meaning: rather than being treated as something to be

reduced, ambiguity is viewed as an inherent characteristic associated with discourse, identity, and organizing” (p. 5). Following those who suggest that ambiguity is an integral part of processes of organizing, I argue that it can be a driver of institutionalization processes. Drawing on well-known Eisenberg’s (1984) article, “Ambiguity as Strategy in Organizational Communication,” I will begin by exploring the notion of *strategic ambiguity*, a central concept in organizational communication research, and use it to introduce Giroux’s (2006) concept of *pragmatic ambiguity*. After this, I will explain in more detail how I used this concept to explore the use of pragmatic ambiguity in conference participants’ talk about theory/concepts and methods and its role in CCO scholarship’s institutionalization. Subsequently, I will show how ambiguities in their positioning of CCO research played into this institutionalization.

Defining Pragmatic Ambiguity

In organizational communication, the notion of ambiguity has often been conceptualized as “strategic ambiguity” (Castor, 2017), following Eisenberg’s celebrated 1984 article. In the article, Eisenberg showed how “ambiguity has been addressed under a variety of labels, including indirectness (Branham, 1980; Nofsinger, 1976; Szasz, 1974), vagueness (Pascale & Athos, 1981), disqualification (Bavelas, 1983; Bavelas & Smith, 1982), and unclarity (Wender, 1968)” (p. 231). “The distinctions among these terms,” he writes, “have themselves been unclear, primarily due to an inconsistent view of meaning” (p. 231).

According to Eisenberg, *strategic ambiguity* “emphasizes the intentional use of ambiguity to achieve particular goals” (Castor, 2017, p. 5) because the interpretation of a

particular term can vary according to the organizational members' preferences. Citing Weick's (1979) work, Eisenberg (1984) argued that some consensus is important for an organization's survival, yet a high level of consensus among organizational members' attitudes and goals is not always necessary, or even desired (Eisenberg, 1984, p. 232). The strategic use of ambiguity can thus "[foster] the existence of multiple viewpoints in organizations" (Eisenberg, 1984, p. 233).

Although Eisenberg's work on ambiguity changed our understanding of the role of ambiguity in organizing processes, Giroux (2006) pointed out that Eisenberg's "own position is paradoxical." "On the one hand," Giroux noted,

he contends that ambiguity can be used strategically, and that it is possible for the source to narrow 'the possible interpretations of a message'; on the other hand, he argues that ambiguity is not in the message, and that it is impossible to identify messages that are more ambiguous than others. (p. 1231)

Giroux (2006) proposed the notion of pragmatic ambiguity to address this paradoxical stance. This notion puts less emphasis on the strategic use of ambiguity and highlights how ambiguity "is first and foremost a textual and inter-textual phenomenon, realized in the choice—strategic or inadvertent—of polysemic words and equivocal grammatical structures, and in the use of certain tropes" (p. 1228). In her study of Total Quality Management (TQM) as a managerial fashion, she showed that "the equivocality of concepts allows for *different courses of action* while maintaining a semblance of unity" (p. 1232, emphasis in original).

Drawing on Callon's (1986) and Latour's (1987/1995) work, Giroux (2006) contended that translation is an important aspect of pragmatic ambiguity, because "any concept must necessarily lend itself to various interpretations to stand a chance of broad dissemination" (p. 1228). "[I]nterpretative viability," that is, "allows that different parties can each 'recognize' their own version of the concept. These parties may thus accept and embrace a concept because they see it as being beneficial to their interests" (Benders & van Veen, 2001, p. 38, cited in Giroux, 2006, p. 1228).

Most importantly for the purpose of this dissertation, Giroux identified three modalities or conditions that are "conducive to pragmatic ambiguity and thus have similar practical consequences" (p. 1232): *ambiguity*, *generality*, and *vagueness*. Relying on *Webster's Dictionary*, she operationalized ambiguity as "the condition of admitting more than one meaning." Thus, a concept *can* be ambiguous

if it has more possible definitions or denotations, or if the number of acceptable definitions for it increases. However, ambiguity is not solely a matter of explicit definition: when a text uses a word in ways that make its meaning undeterminable, or when the same word is used frequently or in close proximity but in contexts which refer to different meanings, or in tropes exploiting this possibility (such as syllepsis), we can say that ambiguity is potentially present. (p. 1233)

Giroux distinguished ambiguity from generality, because "a word is general when it is explicitly defined as various elements or as affecting or applying to more than one situation (e.g. animal vs. dog)" (p. 1233). A generality is thus something that is applicable to "all persons or things belonging to a group, category or system" (p. 1233). It differs from

ambiguity because it does not signify the possibility of multiple meanings; it rather refers to something that could be more specific (i.e., “apple” is more specific than “fruit”).

Finally, Giroux questioned the operationalization of the third modality, vagueness. “In the entry for vague in the Webster’s,” she observed, “vague” refers to something that is “indefinite or indistinct in nature or character, as ideas or feelings.” So, “words referring to feelings or highly abstract ideas are vaguer than words referring to more ‘objective’ states of the world”. (p. 1233). Thus, according to Giroux, the meaning of the term “vagueness” is not defined very clearly in *Webster’s*, which makes it difficult to operationalize. However, as I will show later on in this chapter, the French definition of the term provides additional insight that facilitates this operationalization. That is, the French dictionary *Larousse* (2017) defines “vagueness” as something “that lacks precision, which lends itself to various interpretations, and/or leaves room for doubt” (my translation). The French definition shows how this specific modality of pragmatic ambiguity can be operationalized, because it is possible to find instances of “lack of precision” and “leaving room for doubt” in people’s discourse.

In her research, Giroux (2006) relied on a meso-discursive approach to explore conceptual shifts in published texts and to understand the role of pragmatic ambiguity in the use and proliferation of the concept of TQM. Yet, she also acknowledged the importance of identifying pragmatic ambiguity in social actors’ talk. In this chapter, I will take up Giroux’s suggestion and analyze the role of pragmatic ambiguity—in its three modalities of ambiguity, generality, and vagueness—in conference participants’ public discourse during the 2015 EGOS conference. As I will show, these modalities both contribute to and hinder CCO scholarship’s institutionalization. In my analysis, I distinguish between the role of

theoretical/conceptual and methodological ambiguity in CCO scholarship's institutionalization and that of positional ambiguity (how scholars position themselves and CCO research as an area of research), even though the two are intimately related.

The Role of Theoretical/Conceptual and Methodological Ambiguity in CCO Scholarship's Institutionalization

In this section, I will examine how theoretical/conceptual and methodological ambiguity plays into CCO scholarship's habitualization and objectification. I will also investigate the role of scholars' *questioning* of these kinds of ambiguity. To start, I focus on Robert's⁵ presentation, because his talk and the subsequent discussion exemplify the pragmatic use of conceptual and methodological ambiguity as well as the questioning of this ambiguity in scholars' public discourse. In his presentation, Robert, an assistant professor, talks about an analysis of the role of organizational tensions in *Médecins Sans Frontières*' (MSF aka Doctors Without Borders) organizing, which was part of his doctoral research. Following Robert's presentation, Sophie, an associate professor who is very familiar with his research, asks:

My question is more of a broader question. I'm not sure when you talk about tensions in organization, if your interest is to understand how tension, organizational tensions

⁵ As mentioned in Chapter V, to protect conference participants' identity, I decided to use pseudonyms in my transcripts of their conference talk.

are communicatively constituted, or if tensions constitute organization. It seems that you shift. And not in this paper but in another study you did, you shifted from one to the other.

Robert generally explicitly positions his work as CCO research. He has already published several articles with different co-authors on organizational tensions in well-respected journals, including *Communication Monographs*, one of the flagship journals in the larger field of communication studies, which has increased the legitimacy of his work—and thus also contributes to the legitimacy of CCO research in this and other disciplines. Sophie, however, points out the ambiguity in Robert’s conception of (organizational) tensions by stating that he “switches” between two possible meanings of the constitutive nature of tensions.

The conversation continues as follows:

Robert: Could it be both?

Sophie: Yes, but then analytically how do you distinguish them? How do you go from one to the other?

Robert: Yeah, that is a really interesting point. So, I don’t know maybe you can tell me ((general laughter in the audience)). But maybe I don’t want to... Ha-ha! Maybe we, I don’t have to choose, but for me it would be to explain it to kind of justify it. Here is that side of it, the tension that constitutes and then here is the other side the constitutive kind of tension. So, but, but...

Sophie: Maybe it's not choosing one or the other but being clear on what is one or the other.

In his response, Robert agrees that he has not questioned the possible double meaning of the constitutive nature of tensions. By asking Sophie to help him figure this out, Robert admits that he does not have an answer to this question yet. Moreover, the second part of the discussion suggests that although both meanings associated with the tension-constitution relationship might be pertinent for his research, Robert still needs to reflect on how to *analyze* this distinction (how tensions constitute organization vs. tensions are communicatively constituted). Because Robert's work has a strong empirical focus, he needs to tease out this distinction, as Sophie notes.

Although this is just a "micro-moment" in the larger "conversation" of CCO scholarship, this particular discussion reflects CCO scholarship's "habitualization/formalization struggles" to which I pointed in the previous chapter. By going back and forth between two possible meanings of the constitutive nature of organizational tensions Robert is trying to "formalize" or "stabilize" his conceptual definition. In addition, we see how Sophie uses this ambiguity to point out a lack of formalization in the way Robert (and possibly CCO scholars in general) have operationalized this concept, thus echoing the lack of formalization of CCO methodology/methods discussed in Chapter V. Coming to grips with the double constitutive meaning of organizational tensions, both theoretically/conceptually and analytically/operationally, Sophie and Robert seem to acknowledge through their interventions, is important for moving CCO research on this topic forward.

This scholarly exchange thus illustrates how “pragmatic” ambiguity is for the institutionalization of CCO scholarship. The discussion about the ambiguity in Robert’s work shows that “figuring out” how to conceptualize and operationalize the constitutive nature of organizational tensions is *productive*, because it contributes to the habitualization of CCO research. In addition, in the future, scholars may devote conference papers and journal articles to this ambiguity, which contributes to its objectification. Interestingly, similar to what I found in my analysis of published CCO discourse in Chapter V, we also see here, then, that CCO research on a particular topic may be published in reputable journals *before* CCO scholars have formalized research on this topic.

Another example of the role of conceptual ambiguity in the institutionalization of CCO scholarship can be found in a presentation on the concept of *work* by Kim, a professor. In Kim’s presentation, she proposes to explore the role of work in organizing processes through an empirical analysis of “working out loud.” As a concept, “work,” Kim argues, has not received much attention in CCO scholarship. She proposes to address this issue by mobilizing Taylor and Van Every’s (2000) well-known conversation-text dialectic (see Chapter II). In their conference paper, Kim and her co-author Nancy (also a professor) define “working out loud” “as a process of continuously narrating the work during the course of its realization” (p. 3), and they propose to explore this notion by analyzing Twitter interactions. In other words, by conducting an empirical study of “working out loud,” Kim and Nancy aim to show how the concept of work can be investigated from a CCO perspective. As Kim says during her presentation,

We are not locating our...this practice [working out loud] inside an organization and this is an intriguing element, because in CCO, given the ontological question that CCO scholarship explores, of course, the question of what is an organization and organizing are central, but here we are outside of that. What we are saying also is that work of course is very much present in CCO scholarship but as a concept, as a theoretical concept, is a bit less explored and what we are suggesting...and with this exploration of work, starting from work practices done by workers, that maybe we can use work as a way to deepen CCO reflections.

Kim seems to suggest that the conceptual meaning of “work” in CCO scholarship is vague—one of Giroux’s (2006) modalities of pragmatic ambiguity—because it has not been defined or theorized/conceptualized in much depth. Reflecting the *Larousse* (2017) definition I presented above, the CCO conceptualization of work, Kim seems to suggest, could benefit from greater precision, and their paper aims to begin to provide it.

This particular example illustrates how identifying the imprecise aspects of a concept in CCO scholarship can contribute to the objectification of this area of research. That is, by pointing out the vagueness of particular concepts from a CCO perspective, scholars are able to introduce “new” concepts to CCO scholarship, thus proliferating its conceptual apparatus, so to speak (see also Chapter V). Interestingly, Kim proposes to “manage” the pragmatically ambiguous nature of “work” as a CCO concept by relying on one of the most established CCO concepts (Taylor and Van Every’s [2000] conversation-text dialectic), thus giving her proposal more “weight” and “authority.” As Kim says,

So, when we talk about talk-text form, we highlight the fact that in those tweets, we see the textual, that is making the talk visual in the text, but there is also this possibility of conversation. It is not a conversation that will happen around the tweets, but through the tweets. So the conversation becomes textual, so the text can morph into conversation can become conversation. And what is also interesting in the tweets is that they embody characteristics that are usually associated with either talk or text, and also that tend to be mutually exclusive. In those tweets, they can at the same time...you see invisibility and visibility because those tweets can be seen by everybody. But since there is a large volume of tweets that are produced on a daily basis, they can also remain extremely confidential. They are ephemeral because once it's published it's there and then it disappears. But they can be very persistent if people retweet the tweet or people, you know, engage and start a conversation from those microscopic texts. So, in this a form of oscillation, where some tweets can be made in more a textual form but can also transform, can become conversation, can become talk. So, they can be more or less one or the other. So it's not a question of talk and text, of being one or the other, but it's the possibility of moving from one to the other. So, we have here a textual form that can move out of the text and become talk.

In this excerpt, we see how Kim appropriates Taylor and Van Every's conversation-text dialectic to explicate Kim and Nancy's notion of "working out loud." Working out loud happens, she indicates, *through* the interplay between a text (or in this context a tweet) and conversation in Twitter interactions. Interestingly, then, although it is again a "mere" micro-moment in the larger "conversation" of CCO scholarship, Kim's talk contributes to CCO scholarship's objectification by introducing a new CCO concept *and* by demonstrating the

value, relevance, and legitimacy of CCO scholarship's most-used concepts for research on a contemporary phenomenon like Twitter. Hence, she reinforces the persistence of Taylor and Van Every's concept over time.

Thus, similar to Robert's example I presented above, we see how Kim and Nancy's research identifies an ambiguous aspect of CCO research, which allows them to explore a new concept in a new empirical context. By contributing to the proliferation of CCO concepts, their work contributes to CCO scholarship's objectification. However, as I mentioned in Chapter V, to gain more legitimacy as an area of inquiry, more concerted, systematic, empirical CCO research is needed. Interestingly, however, when discussing the methods Kim and Nancy used to empirically investigate their notion of "working out loud," Kim remains quite general, demonstrating Giroux's second modality of pragmatic ambiguity. As Kim says,

In terms of methods, I am not going to spend too much time on methods because basically we had to invent our method, which doesn't mean that it's not serious but it's... We had to craft our own method because those tweets refer to a practice that is very much distributed and heterogeneous. So, any worker can be working out loud. People working alone. People working in organizations. It is not mandatory, so it's very voluntary. It's not limited to some kind of category of worker. It can be found in any context from surgery to farming to freelance design. So anybody can do, can be doing working out loud. So how do you capture such a distributed phenomenon? So, we had to develop our method and, of course, our approach of finding these tweets. Those tweets were collected by hand, one by one. We have now collected... it's more

than 200 because the process is ongoing so it's a manual data collection and...we combine many approaches to find those tweets.

Kim and Nancy describe their data collection and analysis in greater detail in the paper they submitted to the conference. Yet, in her presentation, Kim remains very general, and she even clearly states that she will “not going to spend too much time” on her methods. The generality in her talk is clearly visible in her choice of words. For instance, when she says that they “collected [the data] by hand” or did “manual data collection,” she uses generic terms that includes a plethora of methods. Kim even says that they “combine many approaches to [manually] find those tweets.” Of course, the EGOS session time constraints could partly explain Kim's use generality when describing her methods and someone who wanted more detail on Kim and Nancy's methods could always go back to their paper. However, as I explained in Chapter V, CCO scholars often remain both general and imprecise in their methodological descriptions. Does this mean that CCO scholars tend to privilege theory over methods, at least when presented with time constraints (during conference presentations) and space constraints (in publications such as journal articles)? As mentioned, if they do, this could hinder the CCO scholarship's institutionalization (particularly its formalization/habitualization).

In this specific instance, we could wonder if by choosing to spend more time on other (theoretical/conceptual) aspects of her research, Kim is avoiding discussion and debate that could contribute to the formalization of CCO research methodologies and methods. Kim and Nancy are using CCO theories to explore a new context and have developed a novel methodology that could provide a relevant example of a CCO methodology. However, in her public discourse, Kim chooses to give more attention to her conceptual developments.

The role of pragmatic ambiguity in discussions on CCO methodologies and methods is also exemplified by Tom's presentation. In his paper and conference presentation, Tom, who is an assistant professor, proposes a theorization/conceptualization of how "things do things with words." Tom argues that many CCO studies "still rely on human spokespeople to make objects talk or to 'be talked by' objects" (p. 1). He adds that "the possibility of reaching 'objectivity' in a variety of work settings relies on acknowledging that things may speak in their own right...[that] other sorts of objects may speak as well, and that they enter the realm of language through yet other objects, i.e., their 'spokesthings'" (p. 1).

Interestingly, as with Kim's presentation, the pragmatic ambiguity in Tom's theorizing/conceptualization becomes especially clear when he discusses the methods he used for his empirical research. That is, Tom often uses a combination of methodological terms in his talk and written work that leaves much room for doubt. For example, during his presentation, Tom introduces his methods by saying, "When I did this kind of observant-interview. I am not sure what to call it." He then continues to talk about his theorization/conceptualization without explaining his methods in more detail. Without further precision, Tom risks leaving his audience quite puzzled. However, in this particular instance, it is not the words *per se* that are vague in Tom's description—taken separately, the terms "observant" and "interview" have clear boundaries and their meaning is well-known for researchers. Rather, it is the *combination* of "observant" and "interview" that creates vagueness because this combination of words could be interpreted in different ways. Tom seems to acknowledge this multiplicity when he admits that he is "not sure what to call it" himself. For instance, we could wonder if Tom observed his research participants while interviewing them, or if he combined observation and interviews in order to explore how things speak to things.

Because those who participate in a particular EGOS subtheme are expected to read the papers before the conference, perhaps Tom presumed that this vagueness would not trouble his audience. Interestingly, though, the way Tom's methods are presented in his paper also creates a sense of vagueness. Throughout the paper, he presents his data collection by using different terms that, taken separately, are not ambiguous. However, combining them creates room for doubt in the reader's mind. For example, Tom starts his paper by stating: "the two ethnographic fieldworks that will be analyzed below" (p. 4), creating the expectation that a multi-ethnographic-fieldwork study will follow in the subsequent pages. A few pages later, Tom states that,

[t]he testimonies of healthcare professionals regarding their use of tools, tests and other devices were gathered through several interviews, both formal and informal, that were conducted as part of a distinct project. As for the tenants' association example, the data is taken from a multi-year ethnography of the organization's work practices. (p. 6)

Tom then further justifies his data collection methods for the first project by writing:

As part of a previous research involvement, I conducted in 2012 five in-depth interviews with healthcare professionals—speech therapists and physical therapists—in addition to several informal conversations. I asked them about their daily routines, how they decide what to do, the tools they use, and their interactions with other personnel. (p. 8)

When discussing the second project, Tom explains that he used "data from a multi-year ethnography" (p. 10), yet then continues his explanations by mainly relying on interviews. Similar to his verbal description during his presentation, Tom is not pragmatically ambiguous

because of his choice of words *per se*—the words “ethnography” and “interviews” in themselves are not vague. Rather, the combination of these methodological terms makes the boundaries of his methodology indefinite and imprecise.

At the start of the Q&A period after Tom’s presentation, Lisa, a young professional researcher, questions Tom’s methodological vagueness by saying:

I just have a suggestion, but you do what you want with it. I saw it more as a theoretical paper with an illustration. I think it was how you shaped it. But I was really interested in knowing more about these cases and how they speak to you and I was wondering maybe...And also you were not really explicit on the methods you used to analyze these excerpts and how many excerpts you considered.

By stating publicly that Tom was not explicit about his methods, Lisa points out the lack of precision in his work. However, rather than focusing on Tom’s data collection methods, she highlights the lack of explicitness in terms of “the methods [he] used to analyze [his] excerpts” as well as “[how] many excerpts” he analyzed—and, implicitly, how he selected these excerpts. Jennifer, the discussant of this specific session who is a full professor, then interrupts Lisa and corroborates her observation by saying that she also wanted to bring up this specific point. In so doing, Jennifer adds weight and legitimacy to Lisa’s intervention. Subsequently, Lisa continues by saying:

But yes, well, my suggestion is to maybe push further the analysis and maybe transform it into an empirical case that would speak to you more, and you could refine your understanding of how these things speak and maybe develop like a typology or

mechanism that allows you to go into the details of what we're saying, like when actually there's interpretation and where and how the things that speak. Because you could really refine this understanding and I would find this, I would find this really interesting to push further. And also, I think it's already convincing, but it could really be more convincing if you could show it in the data like, you know, extract some of this to further refine your theoretical exposé.

In this specific part of her commentary, Lisa tells Tom that his theoretical argument is "already convincing," thus giving legitimacy to his work. However, she points out that the lack of precision in Tom's methods is not limited to the terms he uses, but also pertains to his operationalization because he is unable to "show it in the data." In other words, the ambiguity in his methodological presentation is hindering both his theoretical *and* empirical research.

Tom replies as follows:

Yes, yes, I am planning to push further. As I said, I just, it's just stuff that I had and my hope to be able to get a...It's a study that I was doing on medical ethics that never led to anything really, so I recycled those data ((general laughter)). And now I am planning to push it a bit further and, as you say, make it more empirical. Because it is really in reading those interviews that I kinda got the idea.

By saying that he "recycled those data," Tom seems to provide a justification for the lack of methodological precision in his presentation (and in his paper). Hence, this example illustrates how CCO scholars acknowledge the need for formalizing CCO research (similar to my findings and observations regarding the lack of methodological explicitness and clarity in

published CCO discourse in Chapter V), either by critiquing the work of others, or by critiquing their own work.

The discussion about Tom's methods triggers additional reflection, which is verbalized by Sophie at the end of this specific session. That is, Sophie questions how we, as researchers, can empirically show how objects speak to people:

If we say that things speak to us, then how do we empirically study how things speak to us? And you used interviews, you did some observations, but again there was the mediation of how they were speaking to the people who were speaking to you. That's something that leads to my larger question and, so far, I have this question for you, is that once we have this ontology...we're always with this challenge of how we study it. Someone said we shadow objects, but objects, when people think they are speaking to us, how do we, how do we deal methodologically with speaking, making them speak to us as researchers, at another level, not only to practitioners. I wonder if you have any thought and maybe open up to the other...because, in her paper, Geneviève [Boivin (who presented earlier)] said there wasn't much on methods in CCO ((laughs)).

What is interesting in Sophie's intervention is that she seems to be implying that Tom's theoretical work leads to a much larger methodological question than the one that was suggested by Lisa. Moving beyond Tom's methodological vagueness, she suggests that the CCO community needs to think more deeply about how objects can speak to researchers, and how this can be investigated. Tom replies by saying:

I think your question would be perhaps going a step ahead of what I tried to suggest at this point. You know, for the moment, my point is simply that it is a fact that people in workplace situations, in fact, kind of produce or listen to what things tell them in that given situation. OK, so which is why, for the moment, interviews are I think OK, at least you know to study that. It is an interesting suggestion, however, that indeed it may be also our position as researchers to acknowledge that things speak by themselves, but Jennifer [the aforementioned discussant] already told me that I may be going too far. So, you know, I am not sure. Yes, but it could be an idea. But for the moment, you know, my claim is a bit more humble than what you...than what you are suggesting. It is simply that people do that in fact and we tend to kind of not acknowledge that on our part.

Here, we see that Tom continues to be pragmatically ambiguous. By saying that for the particular theoretical claim he is making “interviews are OK,” and by not explicitly addressing the larger questions Lisa raised, he remains vague. What especially creates room for doubt, though, is that Tom now seems to acknowledge that his research was mainly based on interviews, even though he initially created the impression that his work was ethnographic (a combination of participant observation, formal and informal interviews, etc.) in nature.

My analysis of Robert’s, Kim’s, and Tom’s conference presentations and subsequent discussions illustrates how the different modalities of Giroux’s (2006) pragmatic ambiguity play into CCO scholarship’s institutionalization. I showed that theoretical/conceptual ambiguity can be useful for introducing new theoretical/conceptual issues to CCO scholarship (or for thinking more deeply about existing theoretical/conceptual issues in CCO scholarship),

which contributes to its objectification as a legitimate area of inquiry. However, I also showed that by remaining methodologically ambiguous in both public and published CCO discourse, and avoiding explicit discussion on this topic, CCO scholars hinder CCO scholarship's habitualization/formalization. This corroborates some of the findings and observations I presented in Chapter V, where I noted that CCO scholarship seems to have gained traction within organizational communication studies and other fields, even though it is still in the process of formalizing its different research approaches. However, my analysis also illustrates that CCO scholars themselves take issue with the methodological ambiguity, generality, or vagueness in their colleagues' public discourse. In both Robert's and Tom's case, scholars in the room did so by directly questioning the operationalization of their theoretical/conceptual questions. Kim's presentation did not trigger this kind of discussion, but, as I explained, her presentation could be questioned along similar lines. Hence, my analysis reveals how important it is for CCO scholars to take these discussions seriously (and not to avoid them), because by becoming more specific (less general) and precise (less vague) in their talk and writing about methodological issues, they contribute to the formalization of CCO scholarship, and thus the legitimacy of their area of inquiry.

The Role of Positional Ambiguity in CCO Scholarship's Institutionalization

Now that I have shown the role of theoretical/conceptual and methodological ambiguity in CCO scholarship's institutionalization, I will now discuss how pragmatic ambiguity in some of the EGO conference participants' positioning of the SWG 05:

Organization as Communication subtheme and in their individual positioning with regard to a particular CCO school play into this institutionalization.

Ambiguities in Positioning the SWG 05 Subtheme

To start, I will show how Jim, one of the convenors of the SWG 05 subtheme uses pragmatic ambiguity in his positioning of the subtheme. During his welcome speech in the very first session of the subtheme, Jim describes the subtheme as follows:

We made a proposal, I think, two years ago, to start the standing working group, to find a home for those people who are interested in studying the relations of organization and communication, some would say the constitutive relations, those who like to label CCO, communication as constitutive of organization. But we...the label “communication as organization,” we understand it more broadly. So it’s not only about CCO papers. We’ve got all kinds of papers that come from people that are interested in studying organization from a communication, narrative, discursive lens.

By introducing the subtheme as “not being only about CCO,” Jim—who is speaking on behalf of the other convenors (“we”)—distances himself from CCO scholarship because, according to him, the subtheme is “not only about CCO papers.” Yet, his definition of the subtheme is rather general because a vast number of studies investigate “organization[s] from a communication, narrative, discursive lens.” So, Jim seems to use Giroux’s (2006) generality to include as many people as possible.

Jim then continues to introduce the subtheme without further explaining what he means by communicative perspectives on organizations/organizing. However, a few minutes later, he elaborates his view when he introduces the subtheme's keynote speaker, the aforementioned French organizational scholar, Philippe Lorino:

We invited Philippe, who's a very active member of another standing working group, friendly, a friendly working group. Friends of ours, process organization studies. So I think it's subtheme number 12 or something. They, so he will have, he will have to go back and forth between the two subthemes, but, we invited Philippe because we think there is utility to bring the conversation with this community as well because we think it's right spot on for things that we are discussing over the next few days. We are interested in the relation also of talk and action and the performativity of language but also of (inaudible) of language, which is a focus area that Philippe will talk about. So, we see this paper also as provoking at least thought-provoking and challenging.

In this excerpt, Jim clearly positions Phillippe's research as not being totally part of the SWG 05 subtheme. By saying that Philippe is "a very active member of another working group, a friendly working group, friends of ours," Jim positions him both outside and inside the CCO standing working group. He then continues to say that Philippe's work touches on things that are also discussed in the SWG 05 subtheme. In other words, Jim positions Philippe as having "one foot inside" and "one foot outside" of the subtheme—Philippe played an important role throughout the subtheme, not only as keynote speaker, but also as a discussant in one of the other sessions later on during the conference. So, throughout the introduction, Jim uses general terms that allow him to position the "Organization as Communication"

subtheme as not focusing exclusively on CCO research. Yet, Jim to a certain extent excludes Philippe, the keynote speaker, from the subtheme, even if it could be argued that Philippe's research uses a "communication, narrative, discursive lens." In so doing, Jim oscillates between a general definition of the subtheme and a more specific, exclusive definition.

Throughout the rest of the conference, some other conference participants' talk echoes Jim's talk. For example, in the very last session, Will and Roger, two scholars who are responsible for the wrap-up session of the conference, describe the event as follows:

This subtheme has been concerned with the fundamental, constitutive and formal role of communication for organizations and organizing. Through theoretical, empirical presentations, inquiry, and discussions, the subtheme exposed the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological implications of understanding organization through communication. What communication does to the phenomena of organizing, organization, and the field of organization studies. That communication not only reflects but participates in the constitution of organizing.

Will and Roger's vocabulary certainly highlights the constitutive role of communication in the subtheme, but it also appears to research that does more broadly with "understanding organization through communication." Thus, their closing remarks parallel Jim's opening remarks.

Other participants, though, seem to favor Jim's more exclusive definition. For instance, during the discussion after the keynote speech, one scholar begins her intervention by stating: "We are in a session which is about communication as being constitutive of organization."

Moreover, during some presentations, presenters say things like “in our CCO tradition.” By using this specific language, scholars position the SWG 05 subtheme more squarely within CCO scholarship and seem to want to make its meaning *less* general. Jennifer’s (the aforementioned discussant) concluding remarks during the second session of the conference are especially interesting, in this regard. Jennifer ends her comments by stating:

Well, let me summarize by saying, “My gosh, what a long way we’ve come.” I’ve responded to a lot of panels in communication and a lot of CCO panels and I really believe that these are really pushing important kinds of ways that we’re thinking about what is it that we’re doing and where we are going.

By saying that she has responded to “a lot of CCO panels,” Jennifer clearly defines the presentations to which she is responding as CCO scholarship. What is also interesting is that Jennifer then switches to a language that suggests that she is speaking on behalf of an already established CCO “community” (“that we’re thinking about what is it that we’re doing and where we are going”). What remains somewhat ambiguous (unclear) in her statement, however, is if this community is mainly defined by (organizational) communication scholars (because in the previous sentence, she refers to “panels in communication”), or if it also includes scholars from other fields.

Thus, we see how scholars give different and often ambiguous meanings to the standing working group’s subtheme throughout the conference. By creating the sense that the subtheme is inclusive of other communicative perspectives and other kinds of research, convenors like Jim avoid “discursive closure” that would exclude certain scholars. Hence, we see how pragmatic ambiguity is used to create a sense of “unified diversity” (Eisenberg, 1984,

p. 8). Other participants nevertheless define the subtheme more precisely and exclusively as focusing on CCO scholarship. This brings me back to Giroux's (2006) study of TQM. Giroux (2006) found that,

the popularity of a management approach may well be linked to an increase in pragmatic ambiguity: ambiguous and encompassing constructs facilitate the networking of interests and the widening of the network. The continuing success of the new idea, however—which will preclude its becoming a short-lived fashion—demands the stabilization of the network of interests that was created, or at least of the better part of it. As Latour points out, recruiting allies is not enough: those allies must be solidly linked through the ongoing satisfaction of their interests. (p. 1254)

My analysis indicates that the use of pragmatic ambiguity enables key conference participants, such as convenors, to create the sense that the subtheme is open and inclusive—yet not completely open and entirely non-exclusive. However, if we take Giroux's observations seriously, this ambiguity might hinder CCO scholarship's institutionalization, because it could weaken the links between CCO scholars and blur the boundaries of CCO scholarship, thus making it difficult to see why it has “a legitimate identity of its own” (Kuhn, 2005, pp. 621-622). Those who favor a more exclusive definition of the SWG 05 subtheme, such as Jennifer, implicitly seem to understand the importance of maintaining some kind of boundaries in order to promote the objectification (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996) of their area of research.

Ambiguities in Positioning within CCO Schools During Presentations

As I have shown in Chapter II, CCO scholarship currently has three “pillars” (schools of thought). Most, if not all, CCO review articles or book chapters indeed divide CCO into three different schools of thought (e.g., see Brummans et al. 2014; Schoeneborn et al., 2014; Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). Again returning to Giroux’s (2006) notion of generality, the term “CCO” could be seen as “general” because it is a “category” that includes three specific schools of thought. Thus, scholars who refer to their work as “CCO research” use more general language than those who specify the school within which they position this work in their published and public discourse.

However, as I showed in my analysis of published discourse in Chapter V, most scholars do not position their work within one or the schools (e.g., I showed that from the 206 texts we analyzed, only 48 texts were clearly positioned within one of these schools) and rely on the more general term of “CCO research.” I observed a similar dynamic in scholars’ public discourse during the EGOS conference. That is, few presenters positioned their work within one school, even though they were sometimes more precise and explicit in the papers they submitted for the subtheme. From the 19 presentations I recorded, only three presenters clearly positioned their work within a particular school (two in the Montréal School and one in the Luhmanian School). What I observed more frequently, though, is that presenters situated their research by referring to a well-known CCO scholar (often one of the aforementioned “champions”) without explicitly mentioning the CCO school with which this scholar was associated. Some would, for example, mention that they used concepts like Taylor and Van

Every's conversation-text dialectic or Cooren's ventriloquism (see Chapter II), but they would not explicitly situate their research within a specific school.

This lack of public positioning within CCO schools may contribute to creating a sense of “united diversity” within the CCO community. That is, by not verbally taking position within one of the schools, participants mainly emphasized the similarities between CCO researchers and created an *esprit de groupe*. In so doing, they evaded key debates between the three schools. As I showed in Chapter V, elucidating the unique contributions of each school is important, though, because clarifying the strengths of each of the CCO pillars may help advance CCO scholarship's objectification. Hence, my analysis suggests that it will be useful to organize more public forums (preconferences, panels, roundtables, etc.), similar to some of the recent published forums (e.g., see Schoeneborn et al., 2014), that tease out the differences between the schools.

Conclusion

Building on Giroux's (2006) work, I have shown in this chapter that pragmatic ambiguity is an important discursive “resource” in public academic discourse, and that its different modalities can both help and hinder the habitualization and objectification of an area of research. More specifically, I have shown how the pragmatic use of theoretical/conceptual, methodological, and positional ambiguity played into the institutionalization of CCO scholarship in various ways during the SWG 05 subtheme at the 2015 EGOS conference. For example, my analyses indicated that theoretical/conceptual ambiguity can be useful for

introducing new theoretical/conceptual issues to CCO scholarship, which contributes to its objectification as a legitimate area of inquiry. However, by remaining methodologically ambiguous and avoiding explicit discussion on this topic, CCO scholars also hinder CCO scholarship's habitualization/formalization. Moreover, I found that positional ambiguity is useful for creating a sense of "unified diversity" (Eisenberg, 1984), but it also prevents CCO scholars from identifying the uniqueness of CCO scholarship vis-à-vis other areas of research or the strengths and limits of each of the CCO pillars.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have examined CCO scholarship's institutionalization process based on an analysis of textualized, published academic discourse and of participants' public discourse at the 2015 EGOS conference. In this chapter, I will provide responses to my research questions. That is, I will summarize to what extent CCO scholarship is becoming institutionalized within organizational communication and other fields through scholars' published and public discourse (RQ1) and how this scholarship is becoming institutionalized through public discourse (RQ2). After this, I will discuss the implications of my dissertation research for CCO scholarship, for neo-institutional research on the institutionalization of an area of research within a larger, existing discipline, and for research on the role of pragmatic ambiguity in academic research. To conclude, I will describe the limitations of this dissertation and propose directions for future research.

Summary Responses to Research Questions

To explore the extent through which CCO scholarship is becoming institutionalized within organizational communication and other fields (RQ1), I began by analyzing empirical markers of Tolbert and Zucker's (1996) habitualization, objectification, and sedimentation in scholars' published discourse since the year 2000 in Chapter V. In so doing, I was able to gain

insight into the trajectory CCO scholarship has taken since the term “CCO” first appeared in print. I found additional markers of CCO scholarship’s institutionalization in my analysis of conference participants’ discourse during 2015 EGOS subtheme 16. Together, these analyses showed that CCO research is gaining legitimacy and is becoming more established as an area of inquiry with its own identity. I also found, though, that insufficient focus on formalization combined with the proliferation of theories, concepts, and topics, as well as the lack of clarity regarding each CCO school’s unique contributions, may hinder this institutionalization process. Hence, my analyses suggest that an area of inquiry can gain legitimacy and traction within one or more fields of study even if its conceptual and methodological developments have not been formalized. Interestingly, Tolbert and Zucker (1996) claimed that their multistage institutionalization model represents a “set of *sequential* processes” (p. 181, emphasis added); that is, habituation (formalization) and objectification should form the *basis* or *conditions* for sedimentation. My study indicates, in contrast, that an innovative way of studying organizations can gain traction and institutional coherence even if the first two conditions have not been fully met.

Subsequently, in Chapter VI, I explored how CCO scholarship is becoming institutionalized (RQ2) by analyzing discursive practices that appear to be at the core of this process. That is, I found that conference participants’ used Giroux’s (2006) ambiguity, generality, and vagueness (modalities of pragmatic ambiguity) to introduce new theoretical/conceptual issues to CCO scholarship, and thus contribute to its objectification as a legitimate area of inquiry, yet also to evade methodological discussions and debates, which may hinder CCO scholarship’s habituation/formalization. These results resemble my previous observation that an area of inquiry can gain legitimacy and traction within one or

more fields of study even if its conceptual and methodological developments have not been formalized. Furthermore, I found that being ambiguous in how participants positioned the conference subtheme and their own research in terms of CCO schools may be useful for creating Eisenberg's (1984) sense of "unified diversity," yet that it may also prevent CCO scholars from underlining the uniqueness of CCO scholarship in relation to other areas of research, or the strengths and limitations of the CCO pillars.

These results do not only have important implications for CCO scholarship, but also for neo-institutional research on the establishment of an area of inquiry and research on pragmatic ambiguity, as I will discuss in the next section.

Implications

Implications for CCO Scholarship

As I have started to suggest throughout my analyses as well as in my responses to the research questions in the previous section, this dissertation research suggests that CCO scholars should address important issues to secure CCO scholarship's "persistence over time" (Kuhn, 2005, p. 622), both within and beyond the organizational communication discipline. As I indicated in Chapter V, CCO pioneers were driven by the search for theories that could explain how organizations are constituted *in* communication—similar to Dewey's (1916) quest to explain the constitution of society in communicative terms. However, CCO scholarship has often been criticized for being overwhelmingly theoretical. Surprisingly, CCO researchers are often the first to point out and even critique the area of research's theoretical

focus in their published work. Bisel (2010, p. 126) claimed, for example, that Taylor and Van Every's (2000) work consists of "a dizzying number of linguistic, interpretive, and critical theories to argue that communication is the location and manifestation of organization," while Kuhn (2008) stated that the Montréal School's work, more generally, consists of concepts that "are both rather abstract and are presented in a vocabulary unfamiliar to many" (p. 1232). Bisel suggested, furthermore, that, from the Montréal School's point of view, "McPhee and Zaugg's [Four Flows] model of CCO is too broad"—from McPhee's perspective, on the contrary, the Montréal School's approach "is too narrow to account for communication's multifaceted relationship to organization" (p. 126).

In view of CCO scholars' own observations, this dissertation research suggests that CCO scholarship's institutionalization could stagnate if scholars privilege theoretical over empirical publications and, more importantly, if scholars continue to provide insufficient and pragmatically ambiguous descriptions of their data collection and analysis methods, because such lack of methodological transparency will likely inhibit the ability of graduate students and faculty to appropriate CCO theories concepts in their own work. Various reasons could explain the lack of clarity and precision in CCO scholarship's methodologies. For instance, because of the limited space allocated to articles in academic journals and the time constraints for conference presentations, scholars could continue to be brief and/or ambiguous in their methodological descriptions. My research indicates, though, that adding methodological depth and precision could also help CCO scholars to show the richness of CCO concepts and approaches to explore diverse empirical contexts, as well as to demonstrate the relevance of CCO concepts and approaches for organizational practice.

As I mentioned in Chapter V, CCO scholars have become increasingly concerned with showing the value of their research for organizational practice. To accomplish this, this dissertation research suggests, it is important to demonstrate in more systematic ways what the concrete, empirical relevance is of CCO research insights for organizational leaders, managers, and employees. Methodological ambiguity may not seem very problematic to scholars aiming to push forward strong theoretical arguments. Yet, lack of methodological precision may actually hinder theory/concept development, as I suggested in Chapters V and VI, *and* make it difficult for organizational practitioners to understand CCO research insights can make a difference in their daily organizational lives and practices. Thus, CCO scholars should be careful that both theoretical/conceptual and methodological ambiguity become the norm within their area of research, if they want their area of inquiry to “sediment” within different academic *and* professional fields. As Brummans (2015) noted, the *habitus* of an academic field (Bourdieu, 1988, 2000) is often constituted by an antinomic language-game that pit theory and practice against each other, and this certainly also seems to be the case in organizational communication studies, especially when it comes to the ways in which this field views CCO scholarship. As I mentioned in Chapter I, some have heralded CCO scholarship’s potential for developing “homegrown theories” that may “strengthen our field” and “offer...a discipline-based lens to study organizational phenomena” (Putnam & Mumby, 2014, p. 13), yet few so far have heralded its potential for affecting organizational practice. What my research suggests, though, is that this antinomic language-game does not have to become a defining feature of CCO scholarship’s “system of dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1977), if CCO scholars begin to highlight the nonduality between theory and practice, which can partly be accomplished by being less pragmatically ambiguous in their talk and texts.

Finally, because texts are vital to the institutionalization of CCO scholarship, further effort should be made to publish CCO textbooks. As Palmer, Simmons, and Hall (2013) showed, textbooks are important institutional artifacts and play a key role in the institutionalization of an area of inquiry. Such books will not only bolster CCO scholarship and prevent it from simply being a fashionable topic or fad; they will also force scholars to elucidate their ideas and communicate them in ways that newcomers to CCO research can readily grasp. Writing textbooks will confront scholars with questions such as the following: What are CCO methodologies? And what methods can we use to investigate CCO topics empirically? Addressing these questions, my research shows, is important for CCO scholarship's persistence and growth. Furthermore, textbooks will facilitate the application of CCO scholarship in organizational practice. This point is supported by Kuhn and Schoeneborn's (2015) recent article on "The Pedagogy of CCO." "[A]s a theoretical endeavor," the authors note:

[CCO research] can benefit from the fact that most of our students will eventually enter the practice side of organizational communication in various kinds of job roles and functions...Hence, making students aware of the fundamental and formative role of communication for organizations...will most likely help create a new generation of organizational communication practitioners who are especially sensitized to the inherent complexities of communication in organizational contexts and who will be able to question a simple transmission model of communication and its application in practical settings. (Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2015, pp. 299-300)

These important implications for the institutionalization of CCO scholarship can be used to begin to reflect more broadly on the role of communication (discourse) in the institutionalization of areas of research.

Implications for Research on the Role of Communication (Discourse) in the Institutionalization of an Area of Research

Scholars have argued for some time now that communication is central to institutionalization processes (e.g., see Lammers & Barbour, 2006; Lammers & Garcia, 2014). Tolbert and Zucker (1996) provided the first theoretical model that enabled scholars to investigate the communicative aspects of these processes. More recently, scholars like Hardy and Maguire (2010) and Philips et al. (2004) have shown the value of using a discursive lens to understand institutional phenomena, such as institutional logics or institutional change. Even more recently, Occasio et al. (2015) also provided a useful communicative, discursive theoretical framework for examining the emergence of institutional logics. However, so far, few empirical studies have appropriated these theoretical insights (incl. Tolbert and Zucker's model) to understand the communicative nature of institutionalization (see Powell & Colyvas, 2008, p. 276).

This dissertation has demonstrated the value of this kind of empirical research, showing how an innovative area of research comes into existence and becomes “an institution” through everyday communicative/discursive practices, such as “textwork” (see Van Maanen, 1996, 2011; see also Brummans, 2015) and conference talk (“conversation-work”). As I have shown, published discourse is important for the institutionalization of an

area of research because such discourse provides the *texts* (Taylor & Van Every, 2000) that constitute it; in other words, such discourse enables the *textualization* an area of research. Texts can be defined as “symbolic expressions that are spoken, written, or depicted in some way (Taylor & Van Every, 1993: 108), making them ‘accessible to others’” (Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996, p. 7, cited in Hardy & Maguire, 2010 p. 1367). Hardy and Maguire (2010) noted, in turn, that institutional change depends on the “production, distribution, and consumption of texts” (p. 1367). In this research, I have shown how the production and publication of texts (as well as their subsequent “consumption,” citation, and appropriation by readers) plays into the institutionalization of an area of inquiry.

My research also shows how conversational dynamics play into this institutionalization. As the case of CCO scholarship has illustrated, it is through talk/conversation that professors, researchers, and graduate students can address and question important theoretical/conceptual, methodological, and practical issues in an area of research as well as an area of inquiry’s *identity*. It is also through conversation that scholars can more easily introduce or “test” new ideas, which may eventually become part of the texts or *corpus* that constitutes the area of inquiry. This study thus shows how a budding area of research, such as CCO scholarship, becomes established in the ongoing flux of conversation and text (Taylor & Van Every, 2000).

In turn, because academic conferences provide such ideal venues for academic conversation (and textualization), this study also advances research on the role of *discursive spaces* (Hardy & Maguire, 2010) in the institutionalization of an area of research. According to Hardy and Maguire (2010), “the production, distribution, and consumption of texts

in...multiple discursive spaces” (p. 1365) is an important part of institutionalization processes. They define a discursive space as “a site of contestation in which competing interest groups seek to impose their definitions of what the main [problems] are and how they should be addressed” (Jacobs, Kemeny, & Manzi, 2004, p. 442, cited in Hardy & Maguire, 2010, p. 1367), and they argue that a “discursive space can...provide opportunities to open up ‘an alternative interpretation of reality that relaxes taken-for-granted assumptions, thereby creating a place where new things can be said and new social structures envisioned’ (Fletcher, Blake-Beard, & Bailyn, 2009, p. 84, cited in Hardy & Maguire, 2010, p. 1367). Conferences can thus be seen as *field-configuring events* (Hardy & Maguire, 2010), or, in the context of my dissertation research, *area-of-research-defining events*.

Investigating how not only public discourse, but also published discourse fuels the institutionalization of an area of research, then, can promote reflection on the role of different discursive spaces in institutionalization processes. For instance, the venue spaces where scholars publish their work can be seen as discursive spaces that enable them to present their work and “promote” a particular area of inquiry within one or more fields of study (e.g., in the case of CCO scholarship, in the larger fields of organizational communication as well as management and organization studies) in a more textualized way. In turn, conferences provide discursive spaces where scholars can accomplish similar goals in a more conversational way, through presentations, discussions, and informal conversations. As I will discuss shortly in the section on limitations and directions for future research, the *interplay* between how these discursive spaces drive an area of inquiry’s institutionalization requires more investigation.

Implications for Research on the Role of Pragmatic Ambiguity in Academic Research

Giroux's (2006) work showed how pragmatic ambiguity enabled the proliferation of the TQM concept in management practices. This dissertation links pragmatic ambiguity to institutional analysis and shows that it plays an important role in the establishment of an area of research. Astley (1985) as well as Hirsch and Levin (1999) also explored the role of ambiguity in academic research. As these scholars observed, in academic research, umbrella constructs are "used loosely to encompass and account for a set of diverse phenomena" (Hirsch & Levin, 1999, p. 200, cited in Giroux, 2006, p. 1230). Giroux added that these broad concepts "help make sense of complex theoretical fields by creating a sense of order, and they generate 'scientific communion' (Astley, 1985) by allowing different hypotheses, projects, and interests to be included in the same frame of reference" (p. 1230). My dissertation research extends this literature by showing how ambiguity is used pragmatically in the course of public academic exchanges, a phenomenon which previous studies have not examined, and how such exchanges help and hinder the establishment of an area of inquiry. That is, my research reveals that pragmatic ambiguity in public discourse may indeed "create a sense of order" and "generate scientific communion" in an area of research, yet also *undermine* its establishment, distinctiveness, uniqueness, and identity.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Further Exploration of the Communicative, Discursive Nature of an Area of Inquiry's Institutionalization

Because this study is in many ways exploratory, additional empirical research is needed to gain further insight on the role of communication in the institutionalization of an area of inquiry. Such research could be naturalistic or ethnographic in nature (à la Latour and Woolgar's [1979] *Laboratory Life* or Knorr Cetina's [1999] *Epistemic Cultures*) and could include other kinds of data, collected by interviewing (Spradley, 1979) leading and up-and-coming scholars and observing (Spradley, 1980) or even shadowing (Vásquez, Brummans, & Groleau, 2012) researchers at conferences as well as during their daily work life (as Dick and Ziering Kofman did in their 2002 documentary, *Derrida*).

Combined with a thorough analysis of published discourse, I only analyzed interactions during one specific academic conference in this study. Future studies could observe such interactions at different conferences that regroup scholars of a specific area of research over a period of time to better understand how changes (and regularities) in their public discourse affect their area of inquiry's institutionalization. For instance, it would be useful to collect observational data during CCO subthemes at future EGOS conferences, as well as during CCO panels at other conferences, such as the annual meetings of the International Communication Association or the (U.S.) National Communication Association. Conducting this research will be important in order to understand how "transferrable" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) my findings are to such other venues.

It would also be useful to shadow scholars in other academic contexts, such as their academic departments, to gain more insight into the role of everyday communication in the institutionalization of an area of research. Kuhn (2005) argued, for example, that teaching was important for the institutionalization of the Alta conference. Additional research on the establishment of an area of research within a field of study could therefore include observation of scholars as they advise and mentor graduate students, or while they teach undergraduate and graduate classes. When teaching, these scholars have to translate and simplify an area of inquiry's theories, concepts, approaches, and methods in order to make complex, abstract ideas and techniques "palpable" and "digestible," which could reveal how they themselves make sense of their area of research and how they transmit such knowledge to future generations.

Finally, conducting in-depth interviews with scholars associated with an area of research that is becoming established within a field of study (e.g., in the case of CCO scholarship, scholars associated with the birth of each of the CCO pillars as well as emerging CCO scholars) could provide further insight into these scholars' own trajectory within the area of research and their role in its institutionalization. Such retrospective accounts would be insightful, because they would reveal how these scholars became interested in and (in the case of pioneers or champions) developed the theories, concepts, and approaches that have come to define their area of research.

Further Exploration of the Role of Field-Configuring Events in an Area of Inquiry's Institutionalization

As I have shown, academic exchanges and papers presented during the 2015 EGOS “Organization as Communication” subtheme played a crucial role in advancing CCO scholarship’s cross-disciplinary proliferation. However, additional research is needed to understand the role of such field-configuring events (Hardy & Maguire, 2010)—or area-of-research-configuring events—in the institutionalization of an area of research. As mentioned, according to Hardy and Maguire (2010), conferences are field-configuring events that can play a vital role in a (sub)field’s emergence and establishment. Drawing on Bourdieu’s work and institutional theory, they note that such events are “temporary social organizations...in which people from diverse organizations and with diverse purposes assemble periodically, or on a one-time basis” (Lampel & Meyer, 2008, p. 1026, cited in Hardy & Maguire, 2010, p. 1366). These professional gatherings “provide arenas in which ‘disparate constituents’ are able to ‘become aware of their common concerns, join together, share information, coordinate their actions, shape or subvert agendas, and mutually influence field structuration’ (Anand & Jones, 2008, p. 1037)” (p. 1366) by publicizing and discussing their work. Moreover, as the authors explain, these events’ “temporal and spatial compression (Garud, 2008) provides formal and informal opportunities for face-to-face social interaction, allowing actors to share information, establish patterns of domination, and create mutual awareness of a common enterprise” (p. 1366).

Hardy and Maguire (2010) add that field-configuring events provide an opportunity to open multiple discursive spaces that can influence a field's configuration:

The discursive spaces generated by these events are distinct from those normally available in a field. By bringing together actors who would not otherwise be co-located (e.g., McInerney, 2008; Oliver & Montgomery, 2008), field-configuring events present opportunities for novel or uncommon interactions among field members. At the same time, the fact that field-configuring events occur only for a fixed duration and at particular intervals (Garud, 2008; Zilber, 2007) means that the discursive spaces they generate are temporary. (p. 1368)

In this dissertation research, I focused on the role of “front stage” (Goffman, 1959) public discourse in the institutionalization of an area of research—in a way, published discourse can, of course, be regarded as “front stage” discourse, too. Hence, it would be useful in future research to examine how “back stage” discourse plays into this institutionalization, for example both before and during and before academic conferences. Hardy and Maguire (2010) showed, for instance, that informal conversations outside official conference sessions/panels can play an important role in generating institutional change. In their study of the United Nations intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) meeting, Hardy and Maguire found that discursive spaces such as the official plenary and corridor talk had different purposes during the event. The official plenary sessions mostly served to amend existing legal texts and followed very formal rules. In turn, they showed that corridor talk could be accessed by different types of actors, such as UN agency representatives who could

only participate in the plenary sessions as observers. Thus, in the discursive space of corridor talk, these actors could more easily influence and inform state delegates.

Similar to Hardy and Maguire (2010), it would be useful to investigate the conversations that happen in multiple discursive spaces that co-exist in the context of academic conferences. My analysis focused on the discourses at official sessions of the 2015 EGOS conference. Hence, in future research, it would be useful to expand this focus and to further take into consideration discussions that happen in-between these official sessions or ones during more informal gatherings, such as the receptions, dinners, or even bars. Such conversations most certainly play into the institutionalization of an area of research, yet they are not governed by the same “rules” as the formal official sessions. For instance, actors who do not intervene during official Q&A discussions after presentations may influence presenters during more informal gatherings. Conceptualizing academic conferences as a field-configuring events could highlight the importance of these other spaces—less official moments where scholars express their ideas (perhaps more candidly) and where they develop relationships that are important for the field’s growth.

In addition, seeing conferences as field-configuring or area-of-research-configuring events could reveal other important aspects of an area of inquiry’s institutionalization, such as the role of authority or power. In their study of the United Nation’s field-configuring event, Hardy and Maguire (2010) showed, for example, that:

Not all actors warrant equal voice (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) in a discursive space as a result of the particular sets of rules and understandings regarding text production (who may author texts, of which type); distribution (when, where, and how texts may be distributed); and consumption (who is the target audience; who may access and act on texts). (p. 1382)

It would thus be relevant to explore how power relations play themselves out in communication during academic conferences to understand their effects on an area of inquiry's institutionalization.

To conclude, future research could explore how convenors plan and organize conferences; how and why specific papers are included/accepted or excluded/rejected, and so on. For example, analyzing the submitted papers, reviews, and decisions, or even by shadowing convenors' email communication, Skype meetings, and so forth, while they are planning and organizing the conference, would provide insight into the role of communication in the preparation of area-of-research-configuring events.

Further Exploration of the Complicity between Scholars and an Area of Research

The type of research on the emergence and establishment of an area of research I have conducted is important because it encourages reflexivity as Pierre Bourdieu imagined it (see Brummans, 2015; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Practicing Bourdieu's reflexivity reveals how social actors and fields, whether academic or non-academic (e.g., politics, arts, law, or

medicine), are mutually constitutive and exist in a relationship of *ontological complicity* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Such reflexivity could reveal how students and faculty constitute a relationship of ontological complicity with an area of research in the ongoing flux of conversation and text (Taylor & Van Every, 2000), how this complicity shapes and positions this area vis-à-vis other academic fields as well as professional ones (see also Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2015), and how students and faculty themselves are shaped and positioned in the process. Because actors tend to “construct around themselves an environment that constrains their ability to change further in later years” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 149, cited in Kuhn, 2005, p. 623), this increased collective “self”-awareness could help prevent an area of inquiry’s institutionalization “from becoming dysfunctional” (Kuhn, 2005, p. 623).

In future research on the complicity between scholars and an area of inquiry, it could also be insightful if researchers were to take a more self-reflexive, or even “confessional” (Van Maanen, 1988) stance, than the one I have taken in this dissertation. For instance, in my own research, I could have explored in more detail my own position and role in the institutionalization of CCO scholarship as a Montréal School Ph.D. student, because, as Kuhn (2005) observed, “new generations of graduate students” can significantly influence a field’s sedimentation, affect its trajectory, and show how an area of research “becomes increasingly engrained in [a] field’s consciousness” (p. 622). Future research could this also look at the complicity between students and a budding area of research such as CCO scholarship.

Finally, of course, this study in itself contributes to the institutionalization processes (of CCO scholarship) I have investigated. That is, by tracing the establishment of CCO scholarship within organizational communication studies and other fields in this dissertation, I have also

produced a *text* that will become part of the literature that constitutes this area of inquiry, because this dissertation will be available through the University of Montréal's library database and some of its results have already been published (see Boivin, Brummans & Barker, 2017). Like any published discourse that was analyzed in the first part of this study, this dissertation research may thus contribute to giving legitimacy to CCO scholarship and push its institutionalization forward.

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Appendix

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